

The New Criterion

January 2002

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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The Editors of
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are pleased to announce that

Adam Kirsch

is the winner of the second
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Mr. Kirsch will receive \$3000
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Notes & Comments:

January 2002

The struggles of Anthony Lewis

We know it seems churlish to say “Good riddance!” when someone bids farewell. Just as obituary is a genre that favors eulogy—*de mortuis nil nisi bonum*—so valedictions tend to elicit polite good wishes. There are exceptions to every rule, however, and the final column by Anthony Lewis in *The New York Times* on December 16 vividly demonstrates this truth. As with so many of Mr. Lewis’s contributions to the op-ed pages of the *Times* over the last three decades, “Hail and Farewell” is an excruciating compendium of politically correct clichés that seamlessly blends smug self-satisfaction and unrelenting disdain. It deserves derision, not fond expressions of bon voyage.

To some extent, of course, smugness and self-satisfaction are occupational hazards facing those who regularly write opinion pieces for major newspapers. How could they not be? Expected to speak instantly, and with at least the appearance of authority, on any issue of public moment, such editorialists must adopt a pose of wise knowingness in an atmosphere of maximum exposure. They must write with conviction about matters they barely had cognizance of two days before. Most of them must flog the political and social programs espoused by their newspapers. Their columns gradually be-

come pulpits, dispensing dogma, not insight. The reward is public acclamation—brief, but intoxicatingly intense. Those who lack character come to believe their publicity.

Mr. Lewis is a case in point. His departing column is in some ways a wonderful rhetorical object. In the short space of seven-hundred-odd words it manages to push eighteen left-liberal hot buttons and stand up for twenty-seven—some say thirty-two—articles of East Coast establishment orthodoxy. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., the friend of free-speech libertarians, is lovingly quoted, as he is in so many of Mr. Lewis’s dicta. Moral equivalence? You bet: Mr. Lewis begins by deploring Islamic fundamentalism but then goes on in the next breath to warn that “the phenomenon of religious fundamentalism is not to be found in Islam alone. Fundamentalist Christians in America,” etc., etc. Osama bin Laden and Billy Graham: the twin threats of religious fundamentalism. Citing Justice Louis Brandeis, Mr. Lewis piously tells us that the “most important office in a democracy” is “the office of citizen.” Mr. Lewis, we know, occupies that high office. But what about the millions upon millions of believing Christians in the United States? Do they not count as citizens?

No column by Anthony Lewis is really complete that doesn’t raise the specter of

McCarthyism, so it is only fitting that in this *tour d'horizon* of the “turbulent decades” since the late 1960s, Mr. Lewis informs us that “During the cold war, fear of Communism brought the abuses of McCarthyism.” This is the cue for introducing one of his two main gambits.

Today again fear threatens reason. Aliens are imprisoned for months on the flimsiest of grounds. The attorney general of the United States moves to punish people on the basis of secret evidence, the Kafkaesque hallmark of tyranny. Recently F.B.I. agents went to a Houston art museum and, on suspicion that it was promoting terrorism, scrutinized a work that showed a city skyline burning.

Mr. Lewis is very fond of the word “reason.” Invoking it to bolster ideas and sentiments he approves of is his second main gambit. The “faith in reason,” he tells us, is the “foundation stone of the United States.” Never mind that an equally important foundation stone of the United States is religious freedom—which does not, *pace* Mr. Lewis and the ACLU, mean freedom from religion. Mr. Lewis, of course, is eminently reasonable. All his friends in Cambridge, Massachusetts—since they agree with him on every essential point—are reasonable, too. But God-fearing Christians, the Attorney General of the United States, agents of the F.B.I. are *they* reasonable? Mr. Lewis clearly has his doubts.

What struggles Anthony Lewis has had to endure in his tenure at the *Times*! “I am an optimist about America,” he tells us. But it has been hard, hard:

[H]ow can I maintain that optimism after Vietnam, after the murder of so many who fought for civil rights, after the Red scare, and after the abusive tactics planned by government today? I can because we have regretted our mistakes in the past, relearning every time that no ruler can be trusted with arbitrary power. And I believe we will again.

But no ruler in the United States, with the possible exception of Franklin Roosevelt, has ever been “trusted with arbitrary power.” Mr. Lewis trots out a long list of supposed abuses of power and inappropriate reactions to “fear,” beginning with the Sedition Act of 1798 (a prudent piece of legislation in our opinion). He touches lightly on the internment, during World War II, of thousands of American citizens whose only crime was being of Japanese descent. (Thank you, F.D.R.) But he reserves special fury for John Ashcroft. Why? Every person that John Ashcroft has detained is guilty of some infraction, major or minor as the case may be. And none, we believe, is a U.S. citizen. In our view, given the enormous threat to national security posed by al-Qaeda, the Attorney General’s response has been measured and appropriate—i.e., reasonable.

Anthony Lewis harps again and again on the dangers of yielding to “unreasoning fear.” But what about the culpable folly of not responding to a clear and present danger when it hits one in the face? Thank God people had sense enough to be scared by the Red scare. What Stalin and his successors intended *was* scary, and anyone who doubted that was either a fool or a Soviet apologist (not that the categories are mutually exclusive). On September 11, a small band of murderous fanatics, directed by implacable enemies of America, killed thousands of people, destroyed billions of dollars worth of property, and sent shock waves through the civilized world. It is reasonable to assume that colleagues of those terrorists are secreted here and there around the United States, biding their time.

Editorialists for *The New York Times* are made of stern stuff, we know. It takes a brave man to pontificate for the country’s most powerful newspaper, risking the widespread agreement and adulation of established liberal opinion. Nevertheless, the failure to recognize danger as dangerous is not an expression of bravery or higher virtue; it is a form of sentimentality, an eva-

sion of reality. The proper response to the fearsome is fear, leavened by its moral stimulants: courage and just anger. In "Hail and Farewell," Anthony Lewis says that "The hard question is whether our commitment to law will survive the new sense of vulnerability that is with us all after Sept. 11." We beg to differ. The hard question is how a political simpleton like Mr. Lewis could have lasted thirty-two minutes, let alone thirty-two years, at an organ that prides itself on being our paper of record.

"Everybody's doing it"

Bright children blessed with responsible parents learn early on that "But everyone's doing it!" is no excuse for bad behavior. This is a lesson (one of many) that seems to have been left out of textbooks in life studies published when the baby boomers came of age. Consider the case of Sara Jane Olson, *née* Kathleen Soliah, the fifty-four-year-old middle-class wife of a doctor and mother of three—as well as long-time fugitive from justice and former member of the radical group known as the Symbionese Liberation Army.

In 1999, after more than two decades on the lam, Ms. Olson (who took her new first name from a Bob Dylan tune) was arrested and charged with a bungled attempt to bomb two police cruisers in 1975. (Other escapades of the Symbionese Liberation Army did not end so happily: in 1975, during a bank robbery near Sacramento, a bystander, a mother of four, was killed. And of course there was the bizarre drama—half comic, half pathetic—of the SLA's kidnapping of Patty Hearst.) When Ms. Olson's case came to trial last year, she was prevailed upon by her lawyer to plead guilty to the two felonies ("attempted explosion of a destructive device with intent to murder") in exchange for having three other charges dropped. The charges could carry a twenty-year sentence, though one of about five years is expected.

For many observers, Ms. Olson's guilty plea was a surprise. But not as surprising as her declaration to reporters immediately following the trial. As *The New York Times* reported,

Minutes after entering her plea to two felony counts, she renounced it outside the courtroom. Not only did she have no regrets about what she had done 26 years ago, she said, but "I'm still the same person I was then."

This prompted Judge Larry Paul Fidler to summon Ms. Olson back to court. "The integrity of the criminal justice system is at stake," he noted, pointing out to Ms. Olson that "A guilty plea is not a way-station on the way to a press conference." He then asked her, "Do you wish your plea to stand?" Silence for fifteen seconds. Mumbled response: "All right." "Is that yes?" asked Judge Fidler. "Yes."

Ms. Olson has complained that, in the patriotic, pro-government atmosphere following September 11, she cannot get a fair trial. But what really seems to irk her is the fact that she is being held responsible for things that a) happened a long time ago and b) were done by lots of other people. Why pick on her? After all, many of her friends were engaged in similar sorts of activities. "It was just in the air," Ms. Olson said. "It was impossible to not be involved." *Au contraire*. It was eminently possible not to be involved. All it took was an act of will. "Just say No." It is clear that Ms. Olson's performances in court and with reporters were inept efforts at political theater à la Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin. They didn't work, partly because the times, they are a-changin', partly because Ms. Olson has no excuse but her guilt. Many of the press reports have oscillated between amusement and pity in their attitude toward Ms. Olson. How silly of her to have been caught! We find the humor pretty rancid, frankly, and as for pity, we choose to expend it on people like that unfortunate mother of four whose life was snuffed out by spoiled radicals like Kathleen Soliah.

The cultural war on Western civilization

by Keith Windschuttle

In the last week of September, shortly after the terrorist assaults on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the Prime Minister of Italy, Silvio Berlusconi, made an extraordinary statement. During a visit to Germany, he declared Western civilization superior to Islam. He said:

We must be aware of the superiority of our civilization, a system that has guaranteed well-being, respect for human rights, and—in contrast with Islamic countries—respect for religious and political rights.

The minute he had uttered these words, a bevy of European politicians rushed to denounce him. The Belgian Prime Minister, Guy Verhofstadt, said: “I can hardly believe that the Italian Prime Minister made such statements.” The spokesman for the European Commission, Jean-Christophe Filori, added: “We certainly don’t share the views expressed by Mr. Berlusconi.” Italy’s center-left opposition spokesman Giovanni Berlinguer called the words “eccentric and dangerous.” Within days, Berlusconi was forced to withdraw.

It is true that the statement could have been more diplomatically timed, made as it was while American officials were trying to put together an anti-terrorist coalition of Islamic allies. But there is little doubt it would have generated just as many denials no matter when it was uttered. The statement was extraordinary because, although

Western superiority in every major area of human endeavor, especially in political and individual liberty, is patently obvious to everyone, it has become a truth that must not be spoken.

The chief reason is the prevailing ideology of the Western intelligentsia. For the past two decades and more, the leading opinion makers in the media, the universities, and the churches have regarded Western superiority as, at best, something to be ashamed of and, at worst, something to be opposed. Until thirty years ago, when Western intellectuals reflected on the long-term achievements of their culture, they explained it in terms of its own evolution: the inheritance of ancient Greece, Rome, and Christianity, tempered by the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the scientific and industrial revolutions. Even a radical critique like Marxism was primarily an internal affair, intent on fulfilling what it imagined to be the destiny of the West, taking its history to what it thought would be a higher level.

Today, however, such thinking is dismissed by the radical intelligentsia as triumphalist. Western political and economic dominance is more commonly explained not by its internal dynamics but by its external behavior, especially its rivalry and aggression towards other cultures. Western success has purportedly been at their expense. Instead of pushing for internal reform or revolution, this new radicalism

constitutes an overwhelmingly negative critique of Western civilization itself.

According to this ideology, instead of attempting to globalize its values, the West should stay in its own cultural backyard. Values like universal human rights, individualism, and liberalism are regarded merely as ethnocentric products of Western history. The scientific knowledge that the West has produced is simply one of many "ways of knowing." In place of Western universalism, this critique offers the relativism of multiculturalism, a concept that regards the West not as the pinnacle of human achievement to date, but as simply one of many equally valid cultural systems.

Although originally designed to foster tolerance and respect for other cultures, these sentiments were subsequently captured by the radical left and manipulated to the point of inconsistency. Their plea for acceptance and open-mindedness does not extend to Western culture itself, whose history is regarded as little more than a crime against the rest of humanity. The West cannot judge other cultures but must condemn its own.

Though commonly known as multiculturalism, this position is defined by its supporters with a series of *post* prefixes: postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism. It is best understood, however, as an *anti* phenomenon because it defines itself not by what it is for, but by what it is against. It is entirely a negation of Western culture and values: whatever the West supports, this anti-Westernism rejects.

The aftermath to September 11 provided a stark illustration of its values. Within days of the terrorist assault, a number of influential Western intellectuals, including Noam Chomsky, Susan Sontag, and their youthful counterparts, such as Naomi Klein of the anti-globalization protest movement, responded in ways that, morally and symbolically, were no different to the celebrations of the crowds on the streets of Nablus and Islamabad who cheered as they watched the towers of the World Trade Center come crashing down. Stripped of its obligatory

jargon, their argument was straightforward: America deserved what it got.

This intellectual response was not couched in terms of Western humanist values. Instead, it represented a descent into the kind of relativism not seen since the days of Lenin and Hitler when class-based and race-based hatreds were morally sanctioned by radical politics. The major difference today is that this time it is not class or race but the whole of Western society that has been relativized.

Anti-Westernism constitutes a true ideology: it sees the world as an arena of conflict and has a political program to change the world for its own ends. It is formidable in its comprehensiveness and in the number of intellectual fields it encompasses. They include history, literature, the arts, the social sciences, the physical sciences, and the law.

For the past two decades and more, the leading opinion makers in the media, the universities, and the churches have regarded Western superiority as, at best, something to be ashamed of and, at worst, something to be opposed.

It is also formidable in the number of professional and public institutions it has successfully captured and whose agenda it now controls. Since the demise of Marxism, it has emerged as the major ideological successor. What follows is a summary of the creed, coupled with some of the more obvious objections to it.

"Western culture was founded on aggression towards others": Despite being employed for the purpose of transmitting culture, most of the writers, editors, and teachers who advocate this cause are united in their hostility to the cultural traditions that have nurtured them from birth. They see the

whole of Western culture since the ancient Greeks as something to be disowned.

The person who did most to establish this interpretation is Edward Said, the Arab-American literary critic employed by Columbia University and a long-time activist for the Palestinian cause. His influential 1978 book *Orientalism* claimed that, from its classical origins, Western culture had been defined not by its own internal development, but by its long history of antagonism to “the Other,” that is, to non-Western cultures.

This motif persists, Said claims, from its origins in Homer right down to the modern period. The desire to rule distant peoples has had a “privileged status” in the West. There has been “something systematic” about its imperial culture that was not evident in other empires. Moreover, while Europe’s ability to take over and rule distant colonies might now be a thing of the past, the imperialist imperative lives on today in American foreign and economic policy where it is validated by Western culture and ideology. Said claims it is still driven, as it was in the nineteenth century, by the West’s “untrammelled rapacity, greed, and immorality.”

In particular, he argues, Western oriental scholarship led Europeans to see Islamic culture as static both in time and place, as “eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself.” This gave Europe a sense of its own cultural and intellectual superiority. It consequently saw itself as a dynamic, innovative, expanding culture and rationalized its imperial ambition not as a form of conquest but as the redemption of a degenerate world.

Said has spawned a school of followers from a variety of intellectual disciplines. One of them is Richard Waswo, who, in his 1997 book *The Founding Legend of Western Civilization*, traces how the story of the fall of Troy and the founding of Rome by the Trojan survivors has been represented in Western literature. He calls the story a “legend of perpetual colonization” that “became the rationale for imperialist at-

titudes from ancient Rome to Vietnam.” He examines the legend from its first expression in *The Aeneid* to *The Faerie Queene* to the fiction of Joseph Conrad and E. M. Forster and to its manifestations in the films of John Ford, in the defoliation of Vietnam, and in the current policies of the World Bank.

Waswo is not an historian but is Professor of English at the University of Geneva. This has not, however, prevented him from receiving the endorsement of some of America’s most celebrated academic historians, such as Hayden White, who praised him for having written “a counter-history to the official version, a complete re-reading of the Western canon,” and “an indictment of the whole of Western civilization.” This last phrase summarizes the appeal of the book, not only for aging radicals like White but also for a younger generation of middle-class student protestors. The most prominent among the student rioters against globalization in Seattle, Washington, D.C., and Genoa in the past two years were those who learnt their version of Western cultural history at the feet of teachers inspired by authors like Said, Waswo, and White.

The claim that Western culture has always defined itself in opposition to others is an assumption that usually goes unquestioned in academic debate today. There is, however, very little to recommend it. Although they have long distinguished themselves from the barbarians of the world, Europeans do not primarily draw their identity from comparisons with other cultures. Instead, identity comes from their own heritage. Western identity is overwhelmingly defined by historical references to its earlier selves, rather than by geographical comparisons with others. To claim otherwise is to deny the central thrust of Western education for the past thousand years.

The argument also displays a highly selective view of imperial history in that it ignores empires other than those of Europe. The truth is that all great civilizations have absorbed other peoples, sometimes in harmony, sometimes by the sword. The Islamic

world that this thesis defends is no different. The Ottoman Turks ruled most of the Middle East for a thousand years, largely with the concurrence of their Arab subjects. The British and the French displaced them in the nineteenth century, again with the approval of the Arabs, who by then wanted liberation from Ottoman rule. The Arabs themselves were not indigenous to most of the regions they now populate. Before the Turks, they were an imperial power who arose out of the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century to conquer the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, and Southern Europe. None of this history provokes any censure from the critics of imperialism today, who reserve their reproaches exclusively for the European variety.

“Western literature and art endorse imperialism”: Until the last two decades, most people brought up within Western culture believed that its literature, its art, and its music were among the glories of its civilization. Western literary criticism once aimed to seek out the genius of its authors and to extol their contribution to defining the human condition. Today, much of the academic debate about the Western literary heritage claims that it is politically contaminated. Some of these charges have long been well known because they offended against the post-1970s ideological triumvirate of gender, race, and class: *Othello* is ethnocentric, *Paradise Lost* is a feminist tragedy, *Jane Eyre* is both racist and sexist.

Western literature is today, however, most severely rebuked for its support of imperialism. The theorist making this accusation is, again, Edward Said. He claims the flowering of European literature since the sixteenth century either directly endorsed or provided a supportive environment for the expansion of Europe in the same period. Said draws on the thesis of the French Nietzschean theorist Michel Foucault that all knowledge serves the ends of power and that all intellectual disciplines, including literary and art criticism, are politically motivated.

Said argues this has been especially true of the novel, an art form born and reared in the period when European expansionism knew no boundaries. In his 1993 book *Culture and Imperialism* he claims that, of all modern literary forms, it is the novel that has been most culpable in reproducing and advocating the power relations of empire.

Anti-Westernism constitutes a true ideology: it sees the world as an arena of conflict and has a political program to change the world for its own ends.

His critique encompasses not only novels that are overtly about imperial affairs, such as those of Joseph Conrad and Rudyard Kipling, but even the work of such apparently domestic writers as Jane Austen and Charles Dickens. One of Austen's characters in *Mansfield Park*, Sir Thomas Bertram, owns a sugar plantation in the Caribbean, so this implicates her in support of slavery, Said claims. In *Great Expectations*, Charles Dickens despatches one of his characters to Australia and another to Egypt, so this makes him an imperialist author, too.

Said extends his critique to opera, which he describes as an art form “that belongs equally to the history of culture and the historical experience of overseas domination.” Because Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida* is set in ancient Egypt, Said claims it fosters military aggression towards the Orient. It contains “imperialist structures of attitude and reference” that act as an “anaesthetic” on European audiences, leading them to ignore the brutality that accompanied their conquest of other countries.

Equally culpable are European paintings of the Orient, even those of Delacroix and Ingres, which critics once thought portrayed the region in romantically admiring terms. Instead, art critics who follow Said, such as Linda Nochlin, now use them as examples of subtle and persistent Eurocentric

prejudice against Arabo-Islamic peoples and their culture. They purportedly exhibit the aggressiveness necessitated by the colonial expansion of the European powers. These paintings are primarily a reflection of European arrogance and Western prejudices: "the idea of Oriental decay, the subjection of women, an unaccountable legal system—pictorial rhetoric that served a subtle imperialist agenda."

Presented like this, stripped of their theoretical obfuscation, the ideas are transparently crude. They resemble the reductionism of one-time Marxist criticism, which invariably saw Western art and literature as expressions of "nothing but" the venal interests of the ruling class, the bourgeoisie, or some other culpable social class. They also stretch interpretation beyond credulity. To believe that, because Jane Austen presents one plantation-owning character, of whom heroine, plot, and author all plainly disapprove, she thereby becomes a handmaiden of imperialism and slavery is to misunderstand both the novel and the biography of its author, who was an ardent opponent of the slave trade. Similarly, to argue that because Charles Dickens uses some overseas locations as convenient off-stage sites to advance his plots, he thereby becomes an advocate of empire is to give him attitudes he never expressed. To claim that the art form of opera or the romantic indulgence of the nineteenth-century Orientalist school of painting derives from the European experience of overseas domination is to make an ideological misreading of them all.

Yet such is the authority of the dominant thesis that contemporary writers rush to praise these kinds of analytical crudities. "Readers accustomed to the precision and elegance of Edward Said's analytical prowess," wrote the Nobel laureate Toni Morrison for the cover blurb of *Culture and Imperialism*, "will not be disappointed." In return, not surprisingly, Morrison herself earns equally lavish compliments from the same school of criticism.

Of greater concern is the penetration this

thesis has achieved in the higher education system. Edward Said is the immediate past president of the Modern Language Association, the principal professional association for teachers of literature at American universities. Publishers of books set for these courses now routinely commission the advocates of such theories to edit and introduce the literary texts that students will study. Penguin Books, for instance, engaged Said himself as editor of its latest edition of Rudyard Kipling's masterpiece *Kim*. A like-minded critic was commissioned to introduce the Penguin Classics edition of Austen's *Mansfield Park* and to endorse Said's thesis that this quintessentially domestic author was implicated in British imperial expansion.

"The western economic system exploits the rest of the world": According to this ideology, Western prosperity is based on ill-gotten gains. Globalization, its adherents claim, is a euphemism for American imperialism. The poverty of the Third World is purportedly entrenched by debts to the International Monetary Fund and by the free market policies of the World Trade Organization. Hence, students and trade unionists riot outside the meetings that decide these policies, and church leaders sermonize us to forgive the debt.

Some of this argument is made in historical terms. The capital that funded the industrial revolution, some authors claim, derived from the twin exploitations of colonialism and slavery. Edward Said still cites the work of the Trinidad Marxist Eric Williams, who argued in *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944) that profits from the transport and sale of slaves made a substantial contribution to financing the industrial revolution in Britain. Hence, all those subsequent generations of Europeans who have enjoyed the standards of living provided by industrialism have done so from capital accumulated on the backs of black slave labor.

Another celebrated author in the same genre is Andre Gunder Frank whose book *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*

(1998) rejects the thesis that European entrepreneurship, ingenuity, and technological innovation were responsible for the commercial and industrial revolutions between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. "Europe did not pull itself up by its own economic bootstraps," Frank writes, "and it was certainly not thanks to any kind of European 'exceptionalism,' of rationality, institutions, entrepreneurship, technology, geniality, in a word—of race." Instead, he claims: "Europe climbed up on the back of Asia, then stood on Asian shoulders—temporarily."

Both these arguments, however, are untenable. Some revisionist historians of British colonialism have recently overturned them. In the newly published *Oxford History of the British Empire*, for instance, David Richardson analyzes the contribution of the slave trade to the industrialism in Britain and finds profits from slaving voyages contributed less than 1 percent of total domestic investment in Britain at the time. In other words, slavery was irrelevant to the industrial revolution.

Similarly, the profits from British investments in its empire in the nineteenth century were not exploitative. Historians such as P. J. Marshall, P. G. Cain, and A. G. Hopkins have shown British investment benefited India, Africa, and South America considerably. It provided the infrastructure of ports, roads, railways, and communications that allowed them access to the modern world.

European imperialism ended in the 1940s and 1950s. The non-West has now had half a century to try its own economic prescriptions. The fact that many of these countries have not progressed beyond the kickstart provided by European colonial investment can no longer be blamed on the West. Those who have chosen to emulate the Western model, such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, have shown that it is possible to transform a backward Third World country into a prosperous, modern, liberal democratic nation in as little as two generations. In Japan's case, the model al-

lowed it to rise from the ashes of total defeat to become a world power in less than forty years.

European imperialism ended in the 1940s and 1950s. The non-West has now had half a century to try its own economic prescriptions. The fact that many of these countries have not progressed beyond the kickstart provided by European colonial investment can no longer be blamed on the West.

Those countries that still wallow in destitution and underdevelopment do so not because of Western imperialism, racism, or oppression, but because of policies they have largely chosen themselves. For example, after independence in 1947, India's flirtation with the Soviet bloc and with socialist economics needlessly condemned the country to Third World status, and consigned much of its population to humiliating poverty. Had India chosen the Japanese path, it could have been by now a much greater power than China. It is only in the past decade, with the partial adoption of the liberal economic policies of the capitalist West, that its fortunes have begun to turn around.

Elsewhere in the Third World, American policies of granting and lending money, of setting up factories there and of importing the goods they produce cannot plausibly be regarded as imperialist exploitation. If it were, the countries involved would hardly be holding out their hands for more. Nor would they be recording the economic growth rates that are the envy of all those who lack the same American investment.

"Victimhood should prevail over individualism": Western individualism is another of

the targets of this ideology. It regards individualism as both the cause and effect of capitalism, which in its turn produced the imperialism that now oppresses the wretched of the earth. Individualism is also regarded as deriving from such ethnocentric Enlightenment constructs as human rights. It is the one great barrier to a collectivist solution for humankind. So individualism has to go.

In its place, the creed offers victimhood. Its political constituency comprises those it defines—by whatever stretch of the imagination this might take—as the underdogs and the marginals of society. Within Western countries, this includes ethnic and racial minorities, women, homosexuals, indigenous peoples, the exiled, the poor, the incarcerated, and the insane. Beyond Western society, it includes the masses of the Third World.

It is in pursuit of this political objective that much of the recent revision of the history curriculum has been done. Western history is no longer to be judged by the record of its achievements. Instead, it is to become a story of the struggle of its victims against oppression and discrimination and of how they have risen to challenge their exploiters. Consequently, the purpose of teaching history becomes to “empower” its victims.

One of the key intellectual concepts of victimhood is that of exile. As the number of refugees, asylum seekers, and illegal immigrants around the world mounts, so does the number of exiles. In fact, this is one quality many Western academics believe they have in common with those who now crowd their borders. There are two dimensions to this identification. These intellectuals assume for themselves the role of spokesmen for the poor, the weak, and the disadvantaged. They denounce the governments and powerful interests they claim have produced the desperation of the exiles. Intellectuals, moreover, can share their trauma because, deep down, they are exiles too. Radical intellectuals claim to know what it is like to be psychically banished, to feel displaced, uncertain of their identities,

uncommitted to any location. These feelings even extend to those who still live in the country of their birth but who, because of their ethnic or sexual identity, sense they do not quite belong. One fashionable feminist book about a number of Australian women writers is entitled *Exiles at Home*.

Edward Said claims exile is the real condition of the modern intellectual. Indeed, he says, he knows it at first hand. “My own experiences of these matters,” he says in *Orientalism*, “are in part what made me write this book.” Like many of his kind, however, Said’s claims are self-indulgent fabrications. He is the son of a wealthy Arab-American businessman and grew up in Cairo in a household with a butler, two drivers, and a bevy of servants. He spent his teenage years at an exclusive American private boarding school. He later invented an identity as a Palestinian refugee, a persona that allowed him full exile status:

The life of an Arab Palestinian in the West, particularly in America, is disheartening. There exists here an almost unanimous consensus that politically he does not exist, and when it is allowed that he does, it is either as a nuisance or as an Oriental. The web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, dehumanizing ideology holding in the Arab or the Muslim is very strong indeed, and it is this web which every Palestinian has come to feel as his uniquely punishing destiny.

Similarly, the Parisian poststructuralist feminist celebrity Hélène Cixous complains in a memoir about her adolescent travails as an Algerian Jewish girl in the French colony:

I saw how the white, superior, plutocratic, civilized world funded its power on the repression of populations who had suddenly become “invisible,” like proletarians, immigrant workers, minorities who are not the right “colour.” Women. Invisible as humans. I saw that the great, noble, “advanced” countries established themselves by expelling what was “strange.”

Despite the discrimination and oppression Said and Cixous claim to have suffered, they fail to mention that this same white plutocracy gave both of them tenured university posts that put them among the most materially and occupationally privileged human beings on the planet. Nor do they acknowledge that both enjoy the added indulgence of the freedom to make whatever criticisms they fancy of the countries that sustain them.

The careers of Said and Cixous demonstrate that while it is one thing for a Western academic to pretend to speak on behalf of the wretched of the earth, it is an even smarter tactic to claim to *be* one of the wretched yourself. This way you not only become an articulate symbol of all that suffering but you also disarm your critics. Your words become sacrosanct. Anyone who doubts you or dares to challenge your claims thereby reveals himself as bigoted and uncaring. You are beyond censure.

"The West must be 'provincialized'": One of the most prominent fields of study produced by the ideology I am describing is postcolonialism. This is an intellectual movement focused primarily on the study of history and literature, although it is usually conducted at such an arcane level of theory that former students of either history or literature would find their subjects unrecognizable. Postcolonial social theorists and critics have gained a major foothold in academic life in the United States.

One of the leading tendencies within postcolonialism is the Subaltern Group of Indian historians or, more accurately, theorists about history. In 1994, the *American Historical Review*, the journal of the leading professional association, devoted an issue to them. The Subalterns took their name from terminology used by the Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci. Their origins lay in the 1960s Indian middle-class Marxist movement, the Naxalites, who emulated the Red Guards of Mao Tse-tung's China by assassinating landlords and police in Bihar and West Bengal. A number

of the movement's members subsequently moved to America and Australia where they gained academic positions teaching history.

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Although they address historical topics, the Subalterns offer a radical critique of the discipline, which they see not as a methodology that can be applied to any society but as an ethnocentric product of European culture. History, they assert, is an artifact of the Western nation state. Contesting the imperialism of the West involves contesting its version of history as well. India, of course, gained its independence fifty years ago so one might have thought there has since been plenty of opportunity for its historians to go their own way. The Subalterns insist, however, that they still need to struggle to liberate themselves from European modes of thought, especially English historiography.

Rather than arguing the point at home in India, these theorists choose to do it in the Western education system. Indeed, one reason why there are now so many Indian academics employed in the humanities departments of American universities is because of the network of influence provided by the postcolonial movement.

The aim of their project is to use post-modernist and poststructuralist literary analysis to deconstruct historical documents to recover the voice of the colonial oppressed who, because they were illiterate, left no documents of their own. They want to recover the authentic voice of Indian peasants, bandits, and others of low caste and to rewrite them into history. While English historians have generally regarded

Mohandas Gandhi and the Congress Party as the leaders of the nationalist struggle against British imperialism, postcolonial historians want to argue that it was actually the work of the Indian lower orders.

The postcolonialists have adopted the theoretical tools used by comparable radical ideologues. Their political alliances and connections were describe in the journal *Postcolonial Studies* thus,

Postcolonialism has much in common with other related critical endeavors—such as women’s studies and gay/lesbian studies—classified under the rubric of the “new humanities.” Marked by an underlying scepticism, these closely aligned projects find their shared intellectual vocation in a determined opposition to coercive knowledge systems and, concomitantly, in a committed pursuit and recovery of those ways of knowing which have been occluded—or, in Foucault’s terminology, “subjugated”—by the epistemic accidents of history. Given its particular inheritance, postcolonialism has directed its own critical antagonism toward the universalizing knowledge claims of “western civilization.”

In other words, although it claims to eschew Western culture, the methodology of the postcolonial critique derives from one radical stream of the West itself. The members of this movement want to reject the West but all they are doing is choosing one aspect of its intellectual culture, European poststructuralist theory, over another, English historiography.

Some of them do recognize this dilemma. Dipesh Chakrabarty, a Subaltern historian recently appointed to a personal chair at the University of Chicago, has written a book called *Provincializing Europe* (2000), whose title neatly summarizes the intellectual ambitions of the movement. Provincializing means to “re-read the European philosophers of modernity in order to show up the parochialism of their imagination.”

Chakrabarty also wants to transcend the limits of the methodological assumptions of European forms of investigation. For in-

stance, he wants to incorporate the magical beliefs of traditional India into its history, not as categories to be observed skeptically but as living historical presences. He is too committed, however, to the modern intellect to believe in magic himself so the best he can do is revert to the language of the German Nietzschean philosopher Martin Heidegger and recommend his hermeneutic analysis of “particular ways of being-in-the-world.” In short, Chakrabarty would rather withdraw into arcane and largely irrelevant theoretical speculation than adopt the contaminated tools of English historiography.

Despite the substantial academic and publishing resources now being invested in it, and despite its claim to be showing both Indians and other oppressed peoples how to recover their own epistemological independence, postcolonialism is a profoundly backward intellectual movement. There is nothing about it that is innovatively non-Western or, indeed, original in any way. To use a favorite term of one of its other gurus, the Harvard literary theorist Homi Bhabha, it is yet another example of colonial “mimicry” of the West. Only in this case it shuns the most positive aspects of the Western intellectual tradition in order to mimic the worst.

“Western values are culturally relative”: In 1987, the American philosopher Allan Bloom opened his withering dissection of the faults of the higher education system, *The Closing of the American Mind*, with an observation on the triumph of relativism. “There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of,” he remarked, “almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative.” In the face of the various claims to truth and the divergent ways of life that characterize modern society, higher education had responded, Bloom argued, by promoting the idea that the real danger was the true believer. This, he noted with bitter irony, was “the great insight of our times.”

The study of history and of culture teaches that all the world was mad in the past; men

always thought they were right, and that led to wars, persecutions, slavery, xenophobia, racism, and chauvinism. The point is not to correct the mistakes and really be right; rather it is not to think you are right at all.

More than a decade on, not only does Bloom's observation continue to be true, but relativism has also become institutionalized in the higher education sector and is now taught as a formal doctrine. This is accomplished both through broad intellectual tendencies such as postmodernism and poststructuralism as well as in particular curriculum areas such as cultural studies, anthropology, literary theory, women's studies, the sociology of science, and the history and philosophy of science.

One of the intellectual devices by which this has been accomplished is through a change in the meaning of the term "culture." Until recent decades, this term was widely used in the sense established by Matthew Arnold in his great nineteenth-century tract *Culture and Anarchy* where it meant "the best that has been thought and said." His concept of artistic excellence and of its critical appreciation by an educated elite provided the principal rationale for the teaching of the humanities for the first two-thirds of the twentieth century.

At the same time, however, the discipline of anthropology had its own meaning for the term. Anthropologists used culture in the sense defined by the nineteenth-century German romantic movement, by which it meant the whole way of life of a distinct people. As academic politics after the 1960s succumbed to a fierce kind of egalitarianism in which excellence and elitism became pejorative terms, the Arnoldian definition lost its position. The belief that all cultures were equal took its place.

This notion of cultural relativism entailed a radical rethinking of Western intellectual life. In aesthetic criticism, it meant traditional standards had to be jettisoned. Italian opera could no longer be regarded as superior to Chinese opera. The theater of Shakespeare was not better than that of

Kabuki, only different. In political thought, the pursuit of universal values such as human rights became suspect. Rather than principles that were eternal or self-evident, cultural relativists said these values were bound by their own time and space. They were simply the ethnocentric products of the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment. Instead of human rights, the fashionable term became social justice. Human rights have been written down in declarations and laws, so it is possible to check what they mean. Social justice lacks this quality but this gives it the advantage of meaning whatever you want it to. There is no way of ever telling when it is satisfied.

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Social justice thus offers an unlimited vista of political appeal.

The major problems for the acceptance of cultural relativism have come from its source in anthropology. Cultural practices from which most Westerners instinctively shrink, such as cannibalism, human sacrifice, the incineration of widows, and female genital mutilation, have had to be accorded their own integrity, lest the culture that produced them be demeaned.

This has not been easy but the feminist movement has been the leader in coming to the rescue. Although they initially found the overt misogyny of many tribal cultures distasteful, feminists in recent years have come to respect practices they once condemned. Feminist academics now deny that *sati* is barbaric. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak gives it an honorable place in Indian culture by comparing it to the Christian tradition of martyrdom. Female genital mutilation has

been redefined as genital “cutting,” which Germaine Greer argues should be recognized as an authentic manifestation of the culture of the Muslim women concerned. Similarly, the Parisian literary theorist Tzvetan Todorov, in *The Conquest of America* (1985), compared cannibalism to the Christian Eucharist, and the Australian post-modernist historian Greg Denning, in *Mr. Bligh's Bad Language* (1992), declared human sacrifice to be the ritual equivalent of capital punishment.

To any outside observer, something is obviously going terribly wrong here. The logic of their relativism is taking Western academics into dark waters. They are now prepared to countenance practices that are obviously cruel, unnatural, and life-denying, that is, practices that offend against all they claim to stand for.

The reality is that if all cultures are relative then we are faced with moral nihilism. If values are always expressions of something called culture, and there are no universal moral principles, then no culture can itself be subjected to any values, because there could be no transcultural values to stand in judgment over any particular culture. Cultural relativism, in short, approves any cultural practice at all, no matter how barbaric. It is a philosophy of anything goes.

Cultural relativists, moreover, are faced with two other unresolvable dilemmas. They endorse as legitimate other cultures that do not return the compliment. Some cultures, of which the best known is Islam, will have no truck with relativism of any kind. The devout are totally confident of the universalism of their own beliefs, which derive from the dictates of God, an absolute authority who is external to the world and its cultures. They regard a position such as cultural relativism as profoundly mistaken and, moreover, insulting. Relativism devalues their faith because it reduces it merely to one of many equally valid systems of meaning. So, entailed within cultural relativism is, first, an endorsement of absolutisms that deny it, and, second, a demeaning attitude to cultures it claims to respect.

“Western knowledge is culturally relative”: Despite the overwhelming success of the scientific methods developed in Europe from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, the critics of Western culture still insist that truth is relative. Western knowledge is only one kind of knowledge and Western methodologies are only one of the “ways of knowing.”

There are a number of sources of this cognitive relativism but the most popular is that of Michael Foucault, who argues that truth and objectivity are Western conceits. All knowledge is bound by culture, he claims. Within each culture, knowledge is generated for political purposes. Hence, Western knowledge is politically beholden to the powerful. To signify this interconnectivity, Foucault calls it “power/knowledge.”

This is a congenial argument for postcolonial historians. They believe that Western empirical methods were among the forces that subjugated the Orient, so they regard empiricism and its quest for objective knowledge as a form of imperialism. This is why they are so enamored of the subjective hermeneutics, or literary interpretations, that prevail in postmodernism and cultural studies. Objectivity equals domination; subjectivism equals intercultural equality and respect.

If taken seriously, this means that science can no longer be regarded as a universal method for discovering truths. It means, moreover, that any reasonably coherent doctrine or body of beliefs can produce “truths” of its own. Science is thus reduced to one belief system among many. This view is especially popular within the fields of cultural studies and the sociology of knowledge where science is invariably termed “Western science,” in order to differentiate it from its ostensible competitors. As one of Australia's leading academic sociologists, R. W. Connell, has put it:

The idea that Western rationality must produce universally valid knowledge increasingly appears doubtful. It is, on the face of it,

ethnocentric. Certain Muslim philosophers point to the possibility of grounding science in different assumptions about the world, specifically those made by Islam, and thus develop the concept of Islamic science.

This claim, however, is no different from some of the more grotesque historical examples of relativism in science: for instance, the conflict between “Aryan” and “Jewish physics,” which set back German science under the Nazi regime, and the claims by the Marxist plant geneticist T. D. Lysenko to have developed a “proletarian” approach to science, in opposition to “bourgeois” science. The application of Lysenko’s methods to agriculture not only produced a series of disastrous crop failures in the USSR in the 1930s and 1940s, but was partly responsible for the Chinese famine of 1958–62, the worst in human history, which caused the deaths of between thirty and forty million people during the so-called Great Leap Forward.

One can only wish that, instead of deploying armaments produced by Western technology, the present armed forces and terrorist cells of some Islamic countries heed the advice of the postcolonial theorists and adopt the inventions of Muslim science instead. The most recent Muslim innovation in armaments was the Mameluke curved sabre of the fourteenth century.

The truth is that the scientific method developed by the West is a universal method and its success is sufficient to refute any theory about the relativism of truth. Western science makes genuine discoveries. Western knowledge works, and none of the others do with remotely the same effectiveness. To say this, however, is not to be ethnocentric. Western knowledge has nothing whatever to do with racism, or the elevation of one segment of humanity over another. It endorses a style of knowledge and its implementation, not any particular race of people or ethnic group. This style of knowledge did, of course, have to emerge somewhere and at some time, and to this extent it certainly has links with the Western

intellectual tradition. It emerged in this social context, but it is clearly accessible to people of any background. Far from being bound by Western culture, Western science belongs to the whole of humanity.

“Culture prevails over civilization”: When Silvio Berlusconi spoke of Western civilization rather than Western culture, he was reviving terminology that cultural relativism has rendered uncomfortable. The term “civilization” is not archaic but is actually a concept from the modern era. The word did not come into use until the 1770s. The first time it entered Dr. Johnson’s English dictionary was the fourth edition of 1772, and it was only accepted by the dictionary of the French Academy in 1798.

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Civilization was a concept born in the European Enlightenment and was identified principally with societies that were based on reason, that were open to new ideas, and that looked to the wider world for inspiration. In Germany at the same time, the romantic movement arose in opposition to this. Instead of reason as the basis of social organization, romanticism emphasized organic connections to the land and the virtues of closed rather than open com-

munities. Civilization implied there was a hierarchy of human societies and that there were some who had not made the grade. Civilization meant establishing a polity on rational principles like liberalism and democracy whereas romanticism emphasized the bloodlines of ethnicity and race.

"Civilization" was in common use for the next two centuries. However, it became one of the first casualties of the culture wars of the post-Vietnam War era. After the 1970s it was widely regarded as politically incorrect. Subsequently, it took on an embarrassed and apologetic demeanor and was retained primarily as token usage.

In its place, the romantic concept of culture as a whole way of life came to prevail. Such a view was a direct result of the rise to intellectual prominence of the anti-Westernism identified here. Its version of culture recognizes no hierarchies and no excellence. Western civilization is just another culture. Cultures are beyond good and evil. Accordingly, "cultural studies" is the field that now dominates academic teaching and research in the humanities, in triumph over its adversary, the cultivation of civilization.

Ultimately, this is why Silvio Berlusconi's reference to the superiority of "our civilization" was so shocking, and why so many of his European peers reacted in horror. He threw aside the conceptual shroud that had smothered these issues for so long. While

Berlusconi's usage was striking, however, it was not original. He was echoing words already used by the American president. In the immediate aftermath of September 11, George W. Bush described the terrorist assaults as "an attack on civilization." This instinctive response was the real breakthrough and is one positive cultural outcome of those terrible events. The assaults left anyone who could think for himself with a sudden clarity of vision about what was at stake. This is why radicals like Susan Sontag went out of their way to mock and subvert Bush's usage, by putting terms like "civilization" and "liberty" within scare quotes to undermine their authority, thereby trying, unsuccessfully, to restore the ideological shroud.

We are fortunate there is still a generation that understands the term civilization and is prepared to use it in all its connotations. For it still signifies the yawning chasm that exists between open societies based on universal principles and closed, self-absorbed communities based on relativist, tribal values. If the Western intellectual left had its way, the word would be expunged from memory. If that ever happened, it would be that much harder for the heirs of Western civilization to appreciate all it has achieved and, above all, to be prepared to defend it.

The strange case of D. S. Mirsky

by Hilton Kramer

Of the millions put to death in the Soviet Union during Stalin's reign of terror in the 1930s, the case of the Russian literary critic and historian D. S. Mirsky (1890–1939) is surely one of the strangest. Unlike so many other victims of the Terror, Mirsky may be said to have written his own death warrant by choosing to return to the Soviet Union from a decade-long exile in Britain at the very moment that Stalin was declaring war on intellectuals like himself as class enemies. There were many other Russians, to be sure, who were persuaded to repatriate themselves in order to participate in the brave new world of Soviet Communism, only to find that their ultimate reward was humiliation, arrest, and execution. But few were as heavily burdened as Mirsky was by politically incriminating antecedents. From a Soviet perspective, there could never have been any doubt that Mirsky really was a class enemy.

He was born Prince Dimitry Patrovich Svytopolk-Mirsky, scion of one of the oldest princely families of Russia. He thus belonged to a class which Lenin had earmarked for extinction. Add to this the fact that at the turn of the century Mirsky's father had been appointed Deputy Minister of the Interior and Commander of the Corps of Gendarmes—head of the secret police—in the Czarist government. And then, as a Guards officer in the Civil War that followed upon Lenin's seizure of power, Mirsky himself had fought with the

"Whites" against the Bolsheviks. Given this background, the wonder is not that Mirsky died in the Gulag—which he did in 1939—but that he managed to function as a writer in the Soviet Union for as long as he did: five years, before his arrest in 1937. For, as G. S. Smith correctly observes in his recently published biography of Mirsky,¹ "Stalin's unmistakable agenda was to make literature an instrument of Party control." Yet about the obvious risks which this agenda posed for Mirsky himself, he appears to have remained curiously complacent.

It's not that he didn't work assiduously at the grim task of making himself politically acceptable to the Soviet regime. That, too, is part of the terrible story that G. S. Smith, a professor of Russian at Oxford University, now recounts in harrowing detail for the first time. It is thus a story of Mirsky's betrayal of the writers who befriended him during his decade of exile in the West. It is also, in part, the story of his own betrayal of his literary vocation.

In London in the 1920s, where the classics of nineteenth-century Russian literature were enjoying a considerable vogue, Mirsky had been respectfully received in both literary and academic circles. Among the writers he got to know in London were

¹ *D. S. Mirsky: A Russian-English Life, 1890–1939*, by G. S. Smith; Oxford University Press, 398 pages, \$110.

T. S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley, Bertrand Russell, and Jane Ellen Harrison, as well as Leonard and Virginia Woolf and other luminaries of the Bloomsbury group. He lectured at London University and wrote for the *London Mercury*. Later, in what may be called his Soviet exile, he described the *London Mercury* in *The Intelligentsia of Great Britain* (1935) as “petty middle class—”

people far removed from any kind of moral esthetic extreme, and eminently suspicious of all foreigners, yet none the less completely assured that literature and art correspond to absolute values situated somewhere above the stratosphere and quite unhampered by the transitory trifles of political life.

Still, if we can discount Mirsky’s freshly adopted Marxist-Leninist vocabulary—the book was written in Russian for Soviet consumption—there is much to admire in his assessments of the British literary scene.

The basic trait of Bloomsbury is a mixture of philosophic rationalism, political rationalism, estheticism, and a cult of the individuality [sic]. Their radicalism is definitely bourgeois, a product not even of Shaw’s new progressivism or the Fabians, but of the old bourgeois radicalism and utilitarianism. . . . Bloomsbury liberalism can be defined as a thin-skinned humanism for enlightened and sensitive members of the capitalist class who do not desire the outer world to be such as might be prone to cause them any displeasing impression.

Writing in the 1930s, he also described T. S. Eliot as “the only real poet and the only person of any significance in the group.” And while he praised the novels of Aldous Huxley for depicting “the putrescent capitalist class with exceptional vim,” he nonetheless concluded—correctly—that “Huxley is not at all in the same order as Proust, Joyce, or Eliot.”

It was in London in the 1920s, however, that Mirsky wrote (in English) his masterly *History of Russian Literature*. This is his

best-known work, and one that has remained in print to the present day.² Even the redoubtable Vladimir Nabokov acknowledged that he was “a great admirer of Mirsky’s work”—“In fact,” Nabokov wrote, “I consider it the best history of Russian literature in any language including Russian.”

Professor Smith goes further in tracing the curious history of Mirsky’s masterpiece.

Mirsky is familiar to all students of Russian literature outside Russia, amateur and professional, as the author of what is still generally regarded as the best history of their subject from the beginnings to 1925. This masterpiece was originally published in two volumes, and reissued in a one-volume abridgement. It has held its place in the English-speaking world for over seventy years, which may well be a record for this kind of book. Translations into German, Italian, and French have consolidated its status in Western Europe. Meanwhile, in his native country, Mirsky’s *History* was accessible before 1991 only to the privileged few who held passes to the restricted holdings of the metropolitan libraries, since it was written in English, published in Great Britain and the U.S.A., and was ideologically unacceptable. When the book was eventually translated into Russian, it was published in London like the original, and it has still not been published in Russia.

Mirsky began his literary career in St. Petersburg as an academic philologist and minor poet in the period preceding the Revolution. He was thus a member of what Professor Smith characterizes as “the most talented and tragic generation in Russian history”—the generation which included what he calls “a sainted quartet of poets”: Anna Akhmatova, Boris Pasternak, Osip Mandelshtam, and Marina Tsvetaeva. “In

² *A History of Russian Literature: Comprising a History of Russian Literature and Contemporary Russian Literature*, by D. S. Mirsky, edited and abridged by Francis J. Whitfield. Northwestern University Press, 383 pages, \$19.95 paper.

early adulthood," he writes, "these people had to decide whether to cast their lot for the Revolution or against it, and then to remain in their country or to leave it." Remaining in Russia was not then possible for Mirsky, however. "Whatever his political views may have been at the time," writes Professor Smith, "he had practically no option but to leave Russia: men of his social situation were in principle marked down for physical extermination by the new regime, especially if they had taken up arms against it."

It was in exile, then, mainly in England but with frequent travel to France, that Mirsky entered upon his most productive years as a writer. In addition to the two-volume *History of Russian Literature* (1926–27) and a great deal of literary journalism and translation, he also published in English an anthology of Russian poetry (1924), *Modern Russian Literature* (1925), *Pushkin* (1926), *A History of Russia* (1928), *Lenin*, and *Russia: A Social History* (both 1931). He was also gathering material for the two books that were later published in the Soviet Union: *The Intelligentsia of Great Britain*, written in Russian and translated into English in 1935; and his Russian-language *Anthology of Modern English Poetry* (1937). Alas, in the Orwellian world of Soviet literature this *Anthology of Modern English Poetry* was published under somebody else's name after Mirsky was arrested. According to Professor Smith, "It is still revered by poets and quarried by Russian students of English literature, but to this day not many of them know that it is [Mirsky's] work."

Mirsky's London exile was a remarkable success story in every respect but one: his desperate need to attach himself to a destiny larger than his own. Financially he was not in need, but spiritually he inhabited a void, which even his great love of literature was insufficient to fill. As Professor Smith writes:

He was far more successful at day labour in the Western literary world than anybody else

in the Russian emigration before Nabokov in the 1950s, and as a money-maker he was surpassed only by people whose chosen material did not necessitate translation, such as a few of the painters, dancers, and musicians. . . . The key to Mirsky's success was, obviously, his superb active command of English . . . and that key was turned by Mirsky's driving intellectual energy and ruthlessly disciplined work habits.

Yet in the face of this extraordinary success, which provided him with an income as well as a certain fame, not to mention a guarantee of his personal political safety, Mirsky joined the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1931. And then, in 1932, thanks to the interventions of Maxim Gorky, Mirsky received permission to return to the Soviet Union.

Virginia Woolf, who had met Mirsky in Paris in 1924, has left us with a bleak glimpse of him on the eve of his departure for Moscow. In a diary entry for June 1932, she described her last encounter with him.

Prince Mirsky came with his dubious fluent Russian lady: I mean she was full of temperament; had the free gestures of the Slav; but Mirsky was trap mouthed; opened & bit his remark to pieces: has yellow misplaced teeth; wrinkles his forehead; despair, suffering, very marked on his face. Has been in England, in boarding houses for 12 years; now returns to Russia "for ever." I thought as I watched his eye brighten and fade—soon there'll be a bullet through your head. That's one of the results of war: this trapped cabin'd man: but that didn't lubricate our tea.

I think we can assume that Mirsky was fully aware of Virginia Woolf's snobbery, yet, despite his inevitable descent into Marxist-Leninist dialectics in *The Intelligentsia of Great Britain*, he treated her with considerable respect in that book.

Virginia Woolf may be described as the principal literary expression of Bloomsbury. She is unquestionably a great artist. She has created her own method, a lyrical kind of exposition

of her leading characters—what might be described as an esthetisation of the method used by Chekhov in *The Three Sisters*. Virginia Woolf is even more thin-skinned than Forster is, and she experiences the sufferings of others acutely. But the sufferings with which she deals are limited to purely physiological suffering, as that of a woman growing old, and to individual psychological sufferings caused by the breakdown of personal bonds.

Then comes a heavy dosage of the dialectic:

Wherever [these individual sufferings] do appear as socially conditioned sufferings, they are, as in Proust, without exception the sufferings of the parasitic cream of the bourgeoisie. . . . The suffering is wrapped up in self-contained rhythms and sublimated from the world of reality to a world of esthetics. Her lulling rhythms are a fine example of the narcotic function which art takes on in the hands of liberal esthetes, who turn it into a new and more perfect form of dope, though of course one not intended for the people.

The Intelligentsia of Great Britain concludes with the obligatory prophecy of a “proletarian revolution” coming to Britain. “The interest in the U.S.S.R. is enormous and the interest in marxism is growing . . . everywhere there is healthy young growth; cadres are already forming, cadres who will be able to weld together a genuine sympathy for the cause of the revolutionary proletariat,” and so on. As Professor Smith observes: “The [London] *Daily Worker* was duly appreciative.”

It was left to another English writer, Malcolm Muggeridge, to describe Mirsky’s actual situation in the Soviet Union in the period preceding his arrest. Muggeridge, who had had what he calls “a vague acquaintance” with Mirsky in London, was in Moscow as a correspondent for *The Manchester Guardian*. He gave us a portrait of Mirsky in a novel called *Winter in Moscow* (1934) in the character of Prince Alexis, and there are also glimpses of Mirsky in Muggeridge’s diaries and in the first volume of

his memoirs, *Chronicles of Wasted Time* (1972). Not surprisingly, his description of Mirsky in Moscow in the *Chronicles* is even bleaker than Virginia Woolf’s. It is too long to quote here in its entirety, but the following passage may convey something of its flavor.

He was always invited to Moscow receptions to show any foreigners present that a prince could survive unhurt under a dictatorship of the proletariat. . . . Mirsky always turned up, I think largely for the free champagne. He was a great drinker, and not too well provided with money. In any case he only earned rubles—by writing articles in the *Literaturnaya Gazeta* tearing to pieces contemporary English writers like D. H. Lawrence, T. S. Eliot and Aldous Huxley, to whom, in conversation, he would always refer as “Poor Lawrence!” “Poor Tom!” “Poor Aldous!” I found this sympathetic. In the civil war he had fought with the Whites, afterwards living as an exile in Paris, and associating himself with the most extreme reactionary views. Then he came to London, where, inevitably, he became a professor, and was commissioned to produce a book on Lenin. In the course of working on it he came to see his subject as an enlightened savior rather than, as heretofore, a degraded villain. So he changed from being a prince to being a comrade. . . . When I outlined his career to Luciani, the *Temps* correspondent, he observed sourly that Mirsky had pulled off the unusual feat of managing to be a parasite under three regimes—as a prince under Czarism, as a professor under Capitalism, and as an *homme-de-lettres* under Communism. It was a just saying, but all the same I liked Mirsky.

Mirsky never really succeeded, however, in satisfying the Soviet literary bureaucracy. As Professor Smith observes: “Mirsky had been ‘restored in his Soviet citizenship,’ but he was clearly given to understand that he remained an outsider.” He simply knew too much and cared too much about literature to conform to Soviet requirements, and it was in any case inevitable that his personal history would be held against him. “Mirsky

ran afoul of the highly placed Party members about ten years or so younger than himself," writes Professor Smith, "men to whom his background was alien, offensive, and unredeemable."

Some of the grimmest pages in Professor Smith's biography are devoted to Mirsky's ill-fated attempt to collaborate on the collective production of a book celebrating the construction of the infamous White Sea-Baltic Canal in 1933, a project correctly described by Professor Smith as "a monumental waste of time, money, and human lives," and well-known in the West for several reasons. It famously won the praise of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, who wrote at the time that "It is pleasant to think that the warmest appreciation was officially expressed of the success of the GPU, not merely in performing a great engineering feat, but in achieving a triumph in human regeneration." Later, the White Sea-Baltic Canal project was subjected to a more graphic analysis in the pages of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*. And this murderous project is also remembered today in art circles for the contributions of Aleksandr Rodchenko to the book celebrating its completion. Rodchenko was responsible for the book's photographs and layout, and these were exhibited as admirable works of art only a few years ago at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In

the annals of suffering "sublimated from the world of reality to a world of esthetics," Rodchenko's contribution to the White Sea-Baltic Canal project can hardly be surpassed.

Grimmer still are the verbatim records of Mirsky's interrogation following his arrest which Professor Smith has obtained from the Soviet archives and quoted from extensively in the final pages of his biography. In the Gulag, in the Kolyma mountain range, Mirsky was assigned to logging, and, as Professor Smith reports, "His performance and personal conduct were described as 'unsatisfactory.'" He died in a camp hospital on June 6, 1939. "This is how Comrade Prince D. S. Mirsky, aristocrat of critics, came to his final rest," writes Professor Smith. "At some time in the future, perhaps some way will be devised of setting up, in his own country, a memorial worthy of him. In the meantime, this book may serve as a temporary marker."

D. S. Mirsky: A Russian-English Life, 1890-1939 is far more than a temporary marker, however. In recounting for us the strange case of this greatly gifted writer, Professor Smith has given us a life that reads at times like an updated version of the Russian novels Mirsky himself wrote about so brilliantly. One cannot help but wonder what, if anything, the Russians themselves will now make of it.

Laurence Sterne

by Brooke Allen

Laurence Sterne's masterpiece, *Tristram Shandy*, is seldom read any more outside of graduate seminars. This is a sad fate for the author whom Nietzsche deemed "the most liberated spirit of all time," and whose style, in its day, was considered "the most rapid, the most happy, the most idiomatic of any that is to be found. . . . [T]he pure essence of English conversational style." The novel was wildly popular for years after its appearance. As the enthusiastic James Boswell rhymed, "Who has not *Tristram Shandy* read?/ Is any mortal so ill-bred?"

The book's initial success was due in no small part to its heavy flirtation with obscenity. Such smut was considered bad enough, by certain critics, when the book was published anonymously; when it became known that its author was an Anglican minister, it caused an outright scandal. One correspondent in a popular magazine of the day voiced a widespread objection: "[I]t were greatly to be wished he had been more sparing in the use of indecent expressions. Indecent! Nay, even downright gross and obscene expressions are frequently to be met with throughout the book." This revulsion was shared by Samuel Richardson, at that time the torchbearer of high decorum in fiction: "One extenuating circumstance attends [Sterne's] works, that they are too gross to be inflaming. . . . [H]is own character as a clergyman seems much impeached by printing such gross and vulgar tales, as no decent mind can endure without extreme disgust!"

All this notwithstanding, Sterne was always able to evade the charge of outright obscenity by the skillful use of insinuation and double-entendre: if the reader is dirty-minded enough to draw certain conclusions, the author implies, he has no one but himself to blame. For instance:

La Fosseuse's voice was naturally soft and low, yet 'twas an articulate voice: and every letter of the word *whiskers* fell distinctly upon the queen of *Navarre's* ear—Whiskers! cried the queen, laying a greater stress upon the word, and as if she had still distrusted her ears—Whiskers; replied *La Fosseuse*, repeating the word a third time—There is not a cavalier, madam, of his age in *Navarre*, continued the maid of honour, pressing the page's interest upon the queen, that has so gallant a pair—Of what? cried *Margaret*, smiling—Of whiskers, said *La Fosseuse*, with infinite modesty.

This is a peculiarly English species of humor that has survived more on stage and television than in fiction: Monty Python and Benny Hill can claim direct descent from *Tristram Shandy*, and so can West End sex farces like *Run For Your Wife* or *When Did You Last See . . . Your Trousers?* The popular and deeply silly *Are You Being Served?*, a long-running sitcom set in the Men's and Ladies' Wear floor of a London department store, is full of recognizably Shandean humor. For instance, in one epi-

sode the salespeople are stuck inside the store due to a transit strike. Mrs. Slocum, a formidable lady of a certain age, telephones her neighbor:

Mrs. Slocum: Mr. Singh, would you be good enough to go over to my flat, look through the letter-box, and if you see my pussy, drop a sardine on the mat?

In another show, the salespeople shiver while the heat is turned down in the store during the 1973 oil crisis:

Captain Peacock (pompous middle-aged floor-walker): I hope you're not too cold, Miss Brahms?

Miss Brahms (buxom twenty-something assistant in the ladies' underwear department): No, I borrowed a pair of earmuffs.

All this is straight Sterne, surprisingly unchanged from his day to ours.

Those who were out of sympathy with this style of humor accused Sterne of inserting it merely to attract the vulgar and the prurient. To give him credit, it seems in fact to have sprung to life perfectly spontaneously. Had not his fellow-clerics Rabelais and Swift used obscenity whenever their message required it? "A Very Able Critick & One of My Colour too [i.e. another priest]—who has Read Over *Tristram*—Made Answer Upon My saying I Would consider the colour of my Coat, as I corrected it—That the very Idea in My head would render My Book not worth a groat—still I promise to be Cautious—but I deny I have gone as farr as Swift—He keeps a due distance from Rabelais—& I keep a due distance from him—Swift has said a hundred things I durst Not Say," he insisted, adding mischievously, "—Unless I was Dean of St. Patricks."

Tristram Shandy was published in 1759, when Sterne was forty-six. His sort of dirty joke, or to put it more nicely, Rabelaisian humor, was already going out of style at the time of his death eight years later. Well aware

of the changing Zeitgeist, he wrote his travel book, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (of which he completed only the first volume), in accordance with the new vogue for pathos and sensibility. Published only three weeks before his death, it was nearly as popular as its predecessor and was instrumental in changing public perceptions of its mercurial author.

Already in 1762 John Langhorne in *The Monthly Review* was opining that Sterne's "excellence lay not so much in the humorous as in the pathetic"—a judgment that seems scarcely credible today. The 1782 publication of a tremendously popular anthology, *The Beauties of Sterne*, completed the author's transformation into a proto-Romantic. The editors of this volume isolated the pathetic and sentimental portions of *Tristram Shandy*, *A Sentimental Journey*, and Sterne's published sermons from their frequently ironic contexts. Thus the Laurence Sterne inherited by the nineteenth century was no longer the famously scandalous parson but was, instead, a gentle, reflective harbinger of Romanticism.

The Victorians rejected Sterne's bawdy side even more emphatically than their Romantic fathers had. Dickens was highly unusual, for his era, in his enthusiasm for Sterne's humor; Thackeray—hardly the most puritanical man of his age—was more typical in his impatient dismissal: "Some of that dreary *double entendre* may be attributed to freer times and manners than ours, but not all. The foul satyr's eyes leer out of the leaves constantly."

It took the modernist age, with its obsession with form and its tolerance for sexual content, to once again appreciate Sterne *in toto*. His influential modern admirers included, along with Nietzsche, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and E. M. Forster, who praised the epic's "charmed stagnation." And Sterne has come fully into his own—though perhaps for the wrong reasons—as the darling of the postmodernists, having anticipated by more than two centuries their jokey inversions of fictional conventions and structure. *Tristram Shandy* has a

hero who is not even born until well into the third volume: its preface appears in volume III, its dedication in volume IX; it contains chapters that consist only of one or two lines, or of blank pages. Its storyline, if it can be said to have one, is no more than a series of increasingly absurd digressions, and at one point the author even inserts a graphic representation of the meandering, self-consuming narrative. “Non enim excursus hic ejus, sed opus ipsum est,”¹ he quotes in the seventh volume, gently chiding any reader who might still, at that late date, be hoping for the traditional sequence of *protasis*, *epitasis*, *catastasis*, *catastrophe*, and *peripeteia*.

The debts that writers like Beckett, Borges, Nabokov, and Rushdie owe Sterne are only too obvious. Italo Calvino called Sterne “the undoubted progenitor of all the avant-garde novels of our century.” Milan Kundera said he was the novelist who taught the world to see the novel as a “great game.” Whether or not that is always a good thing is a nice question; so is what Sterne himself, were he to be magically restored to life, might think of his would-be-disciples. He certainly would have thought playfulness in the novel a good thing, but while postmodern writers are playful as a matter of theoretical doctrine, Sterne was simply having a good time. His humor was both lower and purer than that of his postmodern disciples.

Sterne may have been a free spirit, but he was born into constrained circumstances from which he never really escaped: his story, written with sympathy and elegance but without much wit or spark by Ian Campbell Ross, makes for rather sad reading.² Sterne was by all accounts an extremely amusing man—Boswell, who was intimately acquainted with some of the

most entertaining people of all time, pronounced him “the best companion I ever knew”—but Ross seems incapable of bringing this side of his subject to life. His intelligence, yes; his aberrant and self-destructive behavior, his dissatisfaction, his lust, but the wild spirits that made him so popular—and, to many, so unpopular—simply do not come across.

Sterne was born in 1713, the year of the Treaty of Utrecht that ended the War of the Spanish Succession in which his father, Roger Sterne, had served, first as a private and then as an ensign. The Sternes had achieved a position of some prominence in seventeenth-century Yorkshire—the novelist’s great-grandfather, a supporter of the Stuarts during the Civil War, had been rewarded with the Archbishopric of York by Charles II—but Roger Sterne, the younger son of a younger son, had to make his own way in life, a task for which he was singularly ill-equipped. The novelist would later describe him in a family memoir:

My Father was a little Smart Man—active to the last Degree in all Exercises—most patient of Fatigue and Disappointments of wch it pleased God to give him in full Measure—He was in his Temper some what Rapid & Hasty—but of a kindly sweet Disposition—void of all Designe; & so innocent in his own Intentions, That he suspected no one, So that you might have cheated him ten times in a Day—if nine had not been sufficient.

Roger’s good-heartedness, along with his military experiences—he fought in Flanders, at the sieges of Douai and Bethune—have suggested him as an inspiration for *Tristram Shandy*’s good-hearted Uncle Toby.

With the Treaty of Utrecht, Roger Sterne, like countless other army officers, was reduced to half-pay. The family was in fairly desperate straits; the novelist’s earliest memories are of moving about from one army barracks to another, in England and abroad. In 1723 or 1724, Roger Sterne took his son from Ireland back to England to leave him at Hipperholme School near

1 “For this is not a digression (or excursion), but is itself the work.” From the letters of Pliny the Younger.

2 *Laurence Sterne: A Life*, by Ian Campbell Ross; Oxford University Press, 498 pages, \$40.

Halifax, under the care of his brother, Richard Sterne, who accepted responsibility for this unknown nephew with an ill grace. Roger Sterne never saw his son again: he was to die, in Jamaica, in 1731.

There were very few avenues open to a well-educated but penurious young man at that time, and Laurence Sterne seems never to have questioned the decision that he go into the church. It was a field for which, with his intelligence and his sympathetic, imaginative character, he was at least superficially suited, and to the extent that he could rely on any family influence at all it was in that world, for another uncle, Jaques Sterne, was archdeacon of Cleveland and precentor of York Minster. "Jaques Sterne," comments Ross, "might serve as a model of one kind of eighteenth-century clergyman: clever, intensely ambitious, and decidedly worldly"—a sort of precursor of Trollope's Archdeacon Grantly.

Sterne was sent to Jesus College, Cambridge to prepare for taking orders. He received a scholarship established by his ancestor, the archbishop of York, for the benefit of poor scholars. He was ordained deacon in 1737 and, benefiting from his uncle's influence, was licensed to a curacy in Huntingdonshire.

Sterne must have been well aware of the precariousness of his position and the uncomfortable degree to which his future depended on his imperious uncle's goodwill. "If, in entering the Church, Sterne was apparently avoiding the frustrations of the military career his father had followed with so little success," Ross points out, "then he was entering an organization whose rigidly hierarchical structure was essentially no different from that of the eighteenth-century army," and he quotes Joseph Addison, who remarked that the clergy, like the military, were divided into "Generals, Field-Officers, and Subalterns." Sterne, while clearly more intelligent than his father, turned out not to be much more provident; on top of which, he showed a marked aversion for the hard exercise involved in paying court and currying favor. Despite his natural advantages,

his ecclesiastical career turned out to be hardly more profitable than his father's military one had been.

Sterne was ordained priest in 1738 and obtained the living of Sutton-on-the-Forest, some eight miles north of York. Soon afterward he met his future wife, Elizabeth Lumley. Elizabeth, who came from a family as financially straitened as his own, was not much of a catch from a worldly point of view, or from any other point of view for that matter. By the time they married in 1741 she was ill with consumption, as was Sterne himself; she also seems to have been no beauty. A cousin of Elizabeth's summed up the couple's chances rather brutally: "What hopes our relation may have of settling the affections of a light and fickle man I know not, but I imagine she will set about it not by means of beauty but of the arm of flesh."

It is interesting to discover that even at this early age Sterne was considered "light and fickle"; his reputation did not improve with the passing years. The Sternes' marriage, which resulted in several pregnancies but produced only one surviving child, Lydia, was to prove uncomfortable and unhappy almost from the beginning: on the Sunday following the wedding, in fact, Sterne is known to have preached on the text "We have toiled all the night and taken nothing." As the years went on Sterne affected (when not in the pulpit) to disapprove of marriage in general. Samuel Johnson's confidante Hester Thrale recalled him abusing the institution; when one of his audience dissented, saying that "Jesus Christ once honoured a wedding with his presence," Sterne supposedly replied, "but between You & I Sir . . . that was not the *best* thing he ever did."

In 1741 Sterne became a prebendary in York Minster. To be a prebendary, as one contemporary described it, was "a pretty easy way of dawdling away one's time; praying, walking, visiting;—& as little study as your heart would wish." But Sterne had other responsibilities: Jaques Sterne was

cashing in his chips. He was a political powerbroker dedicated to promoting Whig interests in Yorkshire, and in exchange for his exertions on his nephew's behalf he expected the young man to put his talent for writing to work in the Whig cause.

Sterne's career as a political journalist provided him with more stress than pleasure or excitement. While he was a sincere supporter of the Whig political program, sometimes even an ardent one (as he proved by writing some disturbingly anti-Catholic polemics after the Battle of Culloden in 1745), he was in truth not much of a political animal, and eighteenth-century electioneering was violent, corrupt, and unscrupulous—even more so than it is today. He made more enemies than friends during his years of bondage to the Whigs, and eventually abandoned his uncle's cause and, in effect, his own hopes for high office in the church. From then on he was on his own; the solitary battle for preferment was not to be an easy one.

In 1744 Sterne acquired a second living, that of the parish of Stillington which adjoined Sutton-on-the-Forest, and for the next two decades did duty in both parishes, as well as frequent substitute preaching at York Minster for a bit of extra cash. He and Elizabeth also took up farming, which they continued hopefully for years despite their predictable lack of success: "They kept a Dairy Farm at Sutton," remembered one friend, "had seven milch cows, but they always sold their Butter cheaper than their Neighbours, as they had not the least idea of oeconomy, [so] that they were always behindhand and in arrears with Fortune."

Sterne was not entirely unsuited to his priestly calling: he was notably compassionate to his flock, and performed numerous acts of private charity in the parish; he was also a gifted preacher. A servant of his claimed that "the audience were quite delighted with him, & he never preached at Sutton but the [congregation] were in tears." Yet he was an odd clergyman: not only was he an indiscreetly unfaithful husband, but he also appears to have been skeptical almost, on occasion, to the point

of agnosticism, and he kept company with a famously irreligious social set.

In 1759 Sterne ill-advisedly re-entered the political fray when he penned a pamphlet called *A Political Romance*, or *The History of a Good Warm Watch-Coat*, somewhat in the manner of Swift's *Tale of a Tub*, in support of the dean of York Minster in a struggle against the archbishop. Sterne, predictably, had backed the wrong horse, and all five-hundred copies of *A Political Romance* were removed from the printers and burned. (A few copies in fact survive, although Sterne himself was not aware of their existence.) It was Sterne's last effort to win favor in the church. Soon he had declared his independence and embarked upon the first volumes of *Tristram Shandy*.

"Now you desire of knowing the reason of my turning author? why truly I am tired of employing my brains for other people's advantage.—'Tis a foolish sacrifice I made for some years to a foolish person." His friends preached caution: "Get Your Preferment first Lory!" said one—"& then Write & Welcome," but Sterne was fed up with patience and diplomacy. "But suppose preferment is long acoming," he objected, "(& for aught I know I may not be preferr'd till the Resurrection of the Just)."

During this time Sterne was as reckless in his personal life as he was in his career. Elizabeth had suffered a severe nervous breakdown, by most accounts the result of her husband's frequent infidelities, and for a time she was so deranged as to imagine herself the Queen of Bohemia. Apparently Sterne dallied with a number of ladies, but had one particular girlfriend: Catherine Fourmantel, a singer who had created something of a stir at the York Assembly Rooms. "Perhaps because of the unhappy months he had spent during his wife's illness, Sterne threw himself with abandon into this new relationship," Ross writes. "Sterne did not even scruple to sign his full name to compromising billets-doux suggests that his affection for Catherine Fourmantel was fully reciprocated."

The affair with Fourmantel coincided with his completion of the first two volumes of *Tristram Shandy*. Sterne initially offered it to the publisher Robert Dodsley, saying that he thought the book worth fifty pounds; Dodsley disagreed and made a counter offer of twenty. Sterne then decided to stake his own money on it instead, and borrowed enough cash to produce “a lean Edition, in 2 small Vols.”

That Sterne had a great deal of confidence in his novel was evident from his willingness to take financial risks he could scarcely afford. His campaign of self-promotion was equally audacious: he wrote out a letter praising the book and induced Catherine Fourmantel to send it to David Garrick as though it were her own. As a special inducement Sterne added, in the person of Fourmantel, that “the Graver People however say, tis not fit for young Ladies to read his Book. so perhaps you’l think it not fit for a young Lady to recommend it however the Nobility, & great Folks stand up mightily for it. & say tis a good Book tho’ a little tawdry in places.”

No such puffery, as it turned out, was needed. Not everyone knew quite what to make of this odd novel; an anonymous reviewer in *The Critical Review*, for one, simply abandoned the attempt to provide a coherent review. “This is a humorous performance,” he wrote, “of which we are unable to convey any distinct ideas to our readers.” But sales were brisk, surpassing even Sterne’s most sanguine hopes, and he achieved the sort of overnight literary celebrity that comes along only once every two or three decades. Perhaps Boswell described Sterne’s rise to fame better than anyone:

By Fashion’s hands completely drest,
He’s everywhere a welcome guest:
He runs about from place to place,
Now with my Lord, then with his Grace,
And, mixing with the brilliant throng,
He straight commences *Beau Garçon* . . .
Each Waiter with an eager eye
Observes him as he passes by;

“That there is he, do, Thomas, look,
Who’s wrote such a damn’d clever book.”

He dined with Lord Chesterfield; he sat for Sir Joshua Reynolds; he was presented to the Duke of York and eventually the young George III himself (though the king, embarrassingly, showed little enthusiasm for either book or author). This period was by any definition the apex of Sterne’s life, and, as Ross indicates, he spent the eight years remaining to him in a vain effort to regain the heady excitement of those weeks and months.

Tristram Shandy was on many levels a shocking book, and the fact that it was written by a clergyman made it more shocking still. It was not only its bawdy elements that displeased, but also an attitude that could easily be interpreted as freethinking skepticism. The novel cannot be said to have a “message,” but it attacks or at the very least calls into question received ideas in almost every field of human inquiry, particularly in ethics, theology, philosophy, sex, and politics. Sterne had described his plan to Dodsley as being “a most extensive one,—taking in, not only, the Weak part of the Sciences, in wch the true point of Ridicule lies—but every Thing else, which I find Laugh-at-able in my way.” He employed what he called “the Cervantic humour” for the purpose of “describing silly and trifling Events, with the Circumstantial Pomp of great Ones.”

And, of course, although he didn’t mention it, the obverse also holds true: great events are all too often exposed as being only silly and trifling. Sterne inserted verbatim, for instance, several pages of transcriptions of the deliberations of French theologians on the viability of inter-uterine baptism. As is so often the case, no parody or burlesque could match the unutterable absurdity, madness even, of the proceedings; most readers in fact assumed the insertion was a satirical invention of Sterne’s. And while Sterne did indeed lavishly parody the excesses of pedantic scholasticism else-

where in the book, none of his inventions quite equals the matchless nonsense of the real thing.

Sterne soon decided to capitalize on his success by publishing a collection of his sermons, in two volumes. The contrast between the bawdiness of the novel and the relatively conventional nature of the sermons caused comment, but they sold well—even better, in fact, than *Tristram Shandy* itself. Sterne was beginning, miraculously, to escape his bondage to the time-honored system of ecclesiastical preferment. As Ross demonstrates, he was one of the first “respected and respectable” writers who was able to make a living without the benefit of aristocratic patronage: he was a *commercial* writer, an altogether new species of animal.

In 1760 Sterne acquired a new living, at Coxwold on the edge of the moors north of York. There he lived, performing his parochial duties and working on the next volumes of *Tristram Shandy*. “I shall write as long as I live, ’tis, in fact, my hobby-horse,” he decided. It seems clear that Sterne had no particular plan for his *magnum opus*; he simply put out new installments every year or two, and though some critics, most notably Wayne Booth, have attempted to demonstrate that *Tristram Shandy* was carefully constructed and that it ends, with volume IX, just as Sterne had always planned it to end, such arguments are exceedingly unconvincing. In fact the novel ends at the moment when Sterne’s always-frail health finally gave out, and also at the time when his audience began to tire of the novel’s discursive, absurdist style. Even enthusiasts wearied of the fun by the later installments: as Sir Horace Mann remarked, “Nonsense pushed too far becomes insupportable.”

Sterne’s private life continued as chaotic as ever. By now he and his wife had as little to do with each other as possible. “I don’t know what’s the matter with me,” he wrote, “but I’m more sick and tired of my wife than ever—and possessed by a devil urging me to town . . . a lecherous devil that won’t leave me alone, for since I’m no longer sleeping with my wife, I’m more lustful

than I can bear.” Elizabeth Sterne was not in fact much liked by anyone. As her cousin Elizabeth Montagu put it, “Mrs. Sterne is a woman of great integrity and has many virtues, but they stand like quills upon the fretful porcupine, ready to go forth in sharp arrows on the least supposed offence.”

Sterne dumped Catherine Fourmantel when his success brought him into contact with more sophisticated and interesting women; as time went on he would conduct a number of sentimental liaisons, and in 1767 he fell hopelessly in love with a young woman named Elizabeth Draper and carried on a passionate and foolish flirtation. Three months later she went off to India to join her husband, and Sterne spent the time remaining to him—which turned out to be less than a year—writing to her, and keeping for her eventual perusal a journal whose emotional excesses show what Ross rightly calls “an uneasy mixture of the amorous, paternal, and pastoral.” Whether or not he actually had sexual relations with Eliza or any other woman during these years is uncertain: he himself claimed that he did not, and, as Ross points out, there are enough references to impotence in *Tristram Shandy* to give one pause. Sterne died in March 1768, a victim to the consumptive attacks that had tormented him for many years.

Among Sterne’s many fans was Thomas Jefferson, who once declared surprisingly that “The writings of Sterne . . . form the best course of morality that ever was written.” Jefferson was rather an original moralist in his own right, and Sterne, too, was occasionally accused of paying mere lip service to the tenets of his creed—with some justice, it must be admitted. “Tristram pleads his cause well,” the scapegrace John Wilkes remarked upon reading Sterne’s collected sermons, “tho’ he does not believe one word of it.”

Was Jefferson right to represent *Tristram Shandy* as containing in itself a moral system? It is easy for modern readers to appreciate Sterne’s spectacular stylistic genius, or his remarkable way with bawdy and in-

nuendo; to appreciate or even to understand the moral underpinnings of his writing one must imaginatively enter the intellectual world of an eighteenth-century free-thinker who had little choice but to work within a traditional Christian system not only of values but of beliefs.

Ross somewhat ponderously describes *Tristram Shandy* as dealing in essence with the old unanswerable: "If an all-powerful, ever-present God exists, and is the 'best of beings,' why does He allow accident, mere chance, so often to intervene in human life?" It is hard, though, to find much evidence of such tortured and pointless thought in either *Tristram Shandy* or *A Sentimental Journey*; instead, over and over again, the author hints that both enthusiasm and doctrine are irrelevant if not dangerous (*Tristram Shandy's* heated debates between the Nosarians and the Antinosarians are a brilliant parody of Reformation polemic), and that true religion lies only in goodness, tolerance, generosity—whether they be of the Protestant variety, as with *Tristram Shandy's* Uncle Toby, Corporal Trim, and Yorick, or even the Catholic type, as with Father Lorenzo in *A Sentimental Journey*.

Sterne had only contempt for the human race's exalted opinion of its own place in the universe. Man—"with powers which dart him from earth to heaven in a moment—that great, that most excellent, and most noble creature of the world—the *miracle* of nature, as Zoroaster in his book *περι φύσεως* called him—the SHEKINAH of the divine presence, as Chrysostom—the *image* of God, as Moses—the *ray* of divinity, as Plato—the *marvel* of *marvels*, as Aristotle." None of his characters is anything but earthbound. And he significantly makes Tristram's father, who personifies pure intellect detached from judgment and sense, recoil from the new scientific notion that the seat of the soul is in the cerebellum. "The very idea of so noble, so refined, so immaterial, and so exalted a being as the *Anima*, or even the *Animus*, taking up her

residence, and sitting dabbling, like a tadpole, all day long, both summer and winter, in a puddle,—or in a liquid of any kind, how thick or thin soever, he would say, shock'd his imagination"—whereas the cannier Tristram knows very well that "the soul and body are joint-sharers in every thing they get."

In fact, if Laurence Sterne had lived two centuries later and had had other means of getting his living, it is doubtful whether he would have been any sort of Christian at all—though he would undoubtedly have retained his active, ironical interest in moral questions and human perversity in general. But while a moral system is easier to read into *Tristram Shandy* than any other sort of system, it is finally impossible—and completely undesirable—to impose any interpretation on the book. To do so is instantly to turn oneself into Tristram's pedantic father—although many, God knows, have tried. Here is Sigurd Burckhardt, for instance:

The omnipresent sexual innuendo in the novel has, as one of its purposes, that of gaining expression for the "unmentionable" in the literal sense, for what cannot be said except by indirection. In this respect it serves as the metaphor of the unmentionable mystery of the word, of Tristram's paradoxical enterprise of accounting for his "wound" in the very medium of that wound itself. (We might call his quest for health homoeopathic, while Uncle Toby's is allopathic.)

This sort of theorizing immediately self-destructs—or deconstructs, if you will—in Sterne's anarchic laughter, and both explicator and reader end up none the wiser. *Tristram Shandy* resists interpretation in the most resolute way, and for that reason its survival more as an academic object than as a popular "fun read" is sad and pointless. Only when it is once again read for its outrageousness, its licence, its titillating innuendo, its joy, will it come back into its own.

The asymmetrical George Moore

by Richard Tillinghast

Once numbered among the best-known authors and most-controversial literary figures of his day, George Moore has been relegated to a footnote on the Irish Literary Revival of the first decade or so of the twentieth century. His most important book remains *Hail and Farewell* (published in three volumes: *Ave*, *Salve*, and *Vale*), a doorstopper of a memoir of the revival. (Hemingway included the book in his short list of prose works a young writer must read.) In bringing Moore and his times to life in a copiously footnoted biography of more than 600 pages,¹ Adrian Frazier has produced a fascinating picture of the Anglo-Irish writer, a man of many contradictions, immense initiative, and energy: one of the most multifaceted writers of his own or any time.

Moore was born in 1852, the oldest son of George Henry Moore, Member of Parliament for County Mayo, a Catholic landlord, horseman, and famed orator from an old landowning family, who defended the rights of Ireland's impoverished Catholic tenant class. When his father died in 1870, the young George found himself heir to Moore Hall, a Palladian mansion overlooking Lough Carra in the west of Ireland with an estate of over 12,000 acres, yielding a sizeable income. The first of many instances of irreverence in a career filled with a deter-

mination to shock occurred when the heir realized that his father's death made him glad, because it "gave me the power to create myself."

Moore's childhood had not been ideal. His appearance was odd, and his parents succeeded in making him feel stupid. From early days on, an air of the ridiculous—in looks, manner, and opinions—attended Moore. But it was a ridiculousness backed by self-confidence. Moore was born the defiant contrarian. "To be ridiculous has always been *mon petit luxe*," he wrote in *Salve*, "but can anyone be said to be ridiculous if he know that he is ridiculous?" The sublime poet W. B. Yeats, his sometime friend and a chief foil of Moore's Dublin years, was described by contemporaries as ridiculous, but was oblivious, apparently, to this aspect of himself. By Moore's standards, then, Yeats was truly ridiculous, while Moore, who built his persona on it, was not.

"It is the plain duty of every Irishman," Moore wrote in *Ave*, "to disassociate himself from all memories of Ireland—Ireland being a fatal disease, fatal to Englishmen and doubly fatal to Irishmen." He at first thought he wanted to be a painter, and this took him to Paris, where he became not an artist but an art critic. The young man who had rejected his role as Moore of Moore Hall (which is how in his years of literary eminence his publishers would designate him), had by his mid-twenties become acquainted with Manet and Zola and placed

¹ *George Moore, 1852-1933*, by Adrian Frazier; Yale University Press, 604 pages, \$35.

himself in the thick of the new developments in Paris: naturalism and Impressionism. Manet was fascinated by Moore's strange looks, and the young Irishman is the subject of several works by Manet:

Is it my fault if Moore looks like a squashed egg yolk and if his face is all lopsided? Anyway, the same applies to everybody's face and this passion for symmetry is the plague of our time. There is no symmetry in nature.

Manet's *Portrait of George Moore* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1879) is astonishing in its impressionistic approach to human likeness. The right eye is ringed in burnt umber; around the left is an almost bruise-like circle of light purple. The chestnut beard is a study in chaos, the ear like a wobbly slice of aubergine. On each side of Moore's head above the ears, his hair is teased out like two extended points of a waxed moustache. His fleshy lips, his frank and curious eyes express a look of bafflement. Yet behind this "squashed egg yolk," if one looks at it with some knowledge of Moore's character, lie self-possession and determination.

His Paris years were formative. In the cultural capital of the world, the young man who had been an awkward schoolboy only a few years before found himself taken seriously by the leading figures of the French avant-garde. In the English-speaking world he would become known as the "discoverer" of Manet and would later write two influential books on what was then the *dernier cri* in art, *Modern Painting* and *Reminiscences of the Impressionist Painters*. Most of all he would adapt from Manet his personal motto, "Be ashamed of nothing but to be ashamed"—a dubious philosophy, but it was what made George Moore who he was.

For Moore the ephebic novelist, exposure to the naturalism championed by Zola provided an all-important orientation for his entire career. Zola was the model for Moore's realistic novels like *A Mummer's Wife* and *Esther Waters*. Early on, he wrote of himself as "*un ricochet de Zola en Angleterre*."

Events in Ireland precipitated an end to this Parisian idyll. The formation of the Land League in 1879—the same year Manet painted Moore's portrait in Paris—would change things forever for Irish landlords. Moore's letter to his estate agent shows him in his guise as conservative landowner: "This question of the tenants refusing to pay rent is horrible! What does it mean—communism? If you don't get the rents what is to be done?" Almost as soon as the news came, Moore settled his affairs in Paris and returned to Moore Hall where, soon after, he declared on the side of Parnell and Home Rule. But his heart was not, and would never be, in Irish politics. He was first and foremost an aesthete and a writer: "Of all the latest tricks that had been played with French verse," he wrote describing himself in a series of letters for *Le Figaro*, which were later published in book form as *Parnell and His Island*,

he was thoroughly the master; of the size, situation, and condition of his property he knew [nothing]. Indeed he hated all allusion to be made to it, and he looked forward with positive horror to meeting his tenants.

For the immediate future, Moore's working life lay in London. It was there he could earn the living that the Land Wars in Ireland were increasingly depriving him of. (In this he resembles Edith Somerville and Martin Ross, the decline of whose families' fortunes led to authorship as a form of support in the late nineteenth century.)

Adrian Frazier gives an exhaustive account of the Moore's early career as a literary comer in London. The young Irishman was extraordinarily adept, both as a literary politician and, more tellingly, as a tireless writer of poems, reviews, and novels, in making his way in the English capital. "I am working hard for fame," he wrote his mother back in County Mayo, "and I think I shall succeed. I feel that I must conquer. I am conscious that I am a force, rather that I am becoming a force."

Traditionally the route to fame for an

Irish writer has led through the capital city of the empire of which Ireland used to be a member. In the eighteenth century the Irish-born playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan needed the London stage as a platform for his success. In Moore's own times, Oscar Wilde and William Butler Yeats preceded him as masters of London's literary politics. George Bernard Shaw, who knew Moore before he made his name as a novelist, was yet another Irishman who reached the top of the heap in London. Shaw's comments on Moore, as reported by an earlier biographer, are telling:

"There was always a certain delicacy about George and he knew how to be a gentleman when he wanted to." However, he was "always telling stories about himself and women"; the stories usually ended up with the woman throwing a lamp at George. "If you said," Shaw recalled, "'But George, don't talk such nonsense, you are making it all up,' he was not in the least put out . . . but just said, 'Don't interrupt me,' and went on as before." Shaw lost sight of Moore. Then one day William Archer said he had been reading a wonderful naturalist novel by a new author. Shaw asked who it was. "Well," Archer replied, "his name is George Moore." "'Nonsense,' Shaw replied. 'But I *know* George Moore. He couldn't possibly write a real book. He couldn't possibly do anything.' But there it was. He had written it, and then I began to understand the incredible industry of the man."

High praise coming from one of the most industrious writers who ever lived! As he went back and forth between thriving, late-Victorian London and an Ireland shaken by agitation on behalf of tenants' rights and the drive toward Home Rule under Parnell, Moore began a lifelong friendship with Edward Martyn, a man whose background and activities paralleled his own. Martyn's estate, Tyllira Castle, lay only a few miles from Coole Park, Lady Gregory's house near Gort, a dozen miles from Galway City. "Edward," in Frazier's words, "was a 'woman-hater,' the contemporary phrase for a man

who loved men, though for all that Edward was a misogynist as well." Though markedly limited in his literary talents, Martyn was a key figure in the Literary Revival. He was present at the meeting at Mount Vernon, Lady Gregory's seaside house in Dooras, near Kinvara, where plans were laid for the "Celtic Literary Theatre," which would become the Irish National Theatre. (Moore was in London writing fiction when this meeting took place.) Martyn wrote his play *The Heather Field* from a synopsis by Moore, and it appeared as part of a twin bill with Yeats's *Countess Cathleen* at the opening of the Irish Literary Theatre in 1899. The homosexuality of Martyn's youth appears to have been sublimated into a strict, celibate Catholicism as he aged. In addition to the literary patronage he offered such ventures as the National Theatre, he was a major patron of St. Brendan's Cathedral in the town of Loughrea, not far from Tyllira, which is decorated with outstanding examples of modern Irish stained glass by Irish artists such as Sarah Purser and Harry Clarke.

On a personal note, I wangled an invitation to Tyllira some years ago from the owners, a Texas couple who had traded a large yacht for the place and were unaware of its literary-historical significance. It is as fine an example of the neo-Gothic you will see, but few people do, as it is not open to the public. By contrast, practically every literary tourist in Ireland goes to Coole Park just down the road, where Lady Gregory's house was torn down years ago. The chief delight of visiting Tyllira, however, is not the "new" part but the twelfth-century tower house, where Edward Martyn retreated from his mother's matrimonial schemes. Frazier can be a very good descriptive writer, and I quote his description of the eccentric aesthete-turned-ascetic's domicile:

Up the steep stair of the tower, on the first stage Martyn had set up his private place of worship, with a seven-foot-tall candlestick, and a wooden chair copied from a picture by Dürer; on the next stage was the study, lit by Pre-Raphaelite stained-glass windows just

completed in 1883 in London by Edward Frampton: the saints depicted are Chaucer, Milton, Dante, Shakespeare, and Plato. The bedroom at the top had a flagstone floor, a slightly cramped oak four-poster (hardly big enough for two) made in 1616. Beside it was Edward's prie-dieu, kneeler, and prayer rail. Cloistered and encastled, Martyn had built his aesthetic stronghold against his mother's matrimonial plans.

Readers of Yeats's *Autobiographies* will recall that on a visit to Tyllira the great Irish poet, staying in the room in the tower above Martyn's, conducted a séance, during which the spirits, as spirits will, made quite a bit of noise beating on the table and thrashing around the room. Martyn, disturbed both by the noise and by the intrusion of paganism into his inner sanctum, prevailed upon Yeats to desist.

In 1883–84, Moore courted Maud Browne, the daughter of his mother's sister. In this brief courtship as in so many circumstances, Moore proved himself to be a man on whom nothing is lost. His attendance at the Dublin "season"—centered around the Shelbourne Hotel on St. Stephen's Green and the State Ball at Dublin Castle where matches were arranged between the marriageable young women and the eligible young men of Irish society—allowed him to do research from the inside on the upper-class marriage market in Ireland. The figure Moore cut at Dublin Castle and the Shelbourne is suggested by this description he gave of himself later in life: "his lank yellow hair (often standing on end), his sloping shoulders, and female hands—a strange appearance which a certain vivacity of mind sometimes rendered engaging." While his cousin Maud accepted George as a suitor, her family rejected the match. "I consider everything now over between Maud and me," he wrote his mother, "but I shall never forget the horrible system of terrorism to which she has been subjected." The result of his experiences was *A Drama in Muslin* (1886).

The book presents itself as a conventional

women's novel of the late Victorian age, but has many veiled explorations of the unconventional and unsanctioned areas of life. In a plot device suggestive of Maeve Binchy's *Circle of Friends*, it begins tamely enough as the story of a group of Irish schoolmates at the Convent of the Holy Child in England and then follows their adventures as they return to their homes in County Galway and go up to Dublin for the social season I have touched on above. Old money in the person of Lord Dungory, a vainglorious elderly *roué*, cooperates with new money in the person of Mrs. Barton, whose ambition through much of the book is to marry her beautiful daughter Olive to the marquis. Though his only hope of avoiding financial ruin is to marry someone like Olive, who will bring to the marriage a hefty dowry, he does the improvident thing and marries for love. As befits the tact of the age, we are never told clearly that Mrs. Barton and Lord Dungory are lovers until we overhear a conversation between the two on the train as they return from Dublin to Galway. Even then the reader is shielded from the implications of their conversation unless he or she knows French. The two are discussing the latest outrage, a murder in the Irish midlands whose commission has been facilitated by the lawless conditions that prevailed during the Land Wars.

"I wonder," said Mrs. Barton, "what those wretches will have to do before the Government will consent to suspend the Habeas Corpus Act, and place the country in the hands of the military. Do they never think of how wickedly they are behaving, and of how God will punish them when they die? Do they never think of their immortal souls?"

"L'âme du paysan se vautre dans la boue comme la mienne se plait dans la soie."

"Dans la soie! dans la soie! oh, ce milord, ce milord!"

"Oui, madame," he added, lowering his voice, "dans le blanc paradis de ton corsage."

What makes the novel's political commentary so effective is the effortless of

it. Moore never strains to make a point, because the living conditions of the peasantry, the oafishness of the provincial Catholic clergy, the frivolity of the rentier class were all out in plain view for anyone with eyes to see. Here is how word of the Phoenix Park murders, a pivotal act of terrorism that shocked the ruling establishment in 1882, comes to one gentry dinner table:

At that moment the butler entered the room with an entree. Speaking to Mr. Barton he said:

"Very dreadful news has just been received in Gort, sir: Lord Frederick Cavendish and Mr. Burke were murdered last night in the Phoenix Park." The knives and forks dropped clinking on the plates as the entire company looked up with white terror painted on their faces. Mr. Adair was the first to speak:

"This is," he said, "an infamous and lying report that has been put into circulation. . . ."

"It is, unfortunately, quite true, sir; it is in all the Sunday papers."

The agitation for land reform and Home Rule was so unignorable that it seeped inexorably into every conversation in Ireland. It even gives the much-sought-after marquis a chance to escape from the clutches of the marriage his hostess is trying to bribe him into: "I'm afraid I must leave you tomorrow, Mrs. Barton. I shall have to run over to London to vote in the House of Lords."

The novel's most celebrated scene is the procession of carriages headed for the viceroy's reception at Dublin Castle, seat of British rule in Ireland:

Notwithstanding the terrible weather the streets were lined with vagrants, patriots, waifs, idlers of all sorts and kinds. Plenty of girls of sixteen and eighteen come out to see the "finery." Poor little things in battered bonnets and dragged skirts, who would dream upon ten shillings a week; a drunken mother striving to hush a child that dies beneath a dripping shawl; a harlot embittered by feelings of commercial resentment; troops of labourers battered and bruised with toil: you

see their hang-dog faces, their thin coats, their shirts torn and revealing the beast-like hair on their chests; you see also the Irish-Americans, with their sinister faces, and broad-brimmed hats, standing scowling beneath the pale flickering gas-lamps, and, when the block brought the carriages to a standstill, sometimes no more than a foot of space separated their occupants from the crowd on the pavement's edge. Never were poverty and wealth brought into plainer proximity. In the broad glare of the carriage lights the shape of every feature, even the colour of the eyes, every glance, every detail of dress, every stain of misery were revealed to the silken exquisites who, a little frightened, strove to hide themselves within the scented shadows of their broughams: and, in like manner, the bloom on every aristocratic cheek, the glitter of every diamond, the richness of every plume were visible to the avid eyes of those who stood without in the wet and the cold.

"I wish they would not stare so," said Mrs. Barton; "one would think they were a lot of hungry children looking into a sweetmeat shop. The police really ought to prevent it."

A decade and a half would pass between *A Drama in Muslin* and Moore's return from England to Ireland at the beginning of the new century. This was the period of his blockbuster naturalistic novel, *Esther Waters*, his canvas for exploring those he described to his brother as

the people I love and understand—the dull Saxon. Flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone—how I love that thick-witted race. . . . I want to paint the portrait of the Saxon in his habit of instinctive hypocrisy . . . the Cotton Factory behind him starting from the cricket field.

This was also the period of his long affair with Maud Burke, Lady Cunard. Speculation is that Moore was the father of Lady Cunard's daughter Nancy, and in any case an affectionate friendship between the two developed, and she wrote a memoir of Moore which gives an intimate picture of him at his leisure. When she asked him if

she was indeed his daughter he replied, "Oh my Lord! Never ask your mother that!"

During the period of his eminence as an English man of letters, Moore met Yeats in London and began to be drawn, little by little, into the Irish literary scene. Frazier's answer to the question "Why did George Moore, like a cosmopolitan Lord Jim, make a standing jump from all that he had known for the last thirty years into the strange seas of Dublin political life?" is that, in addition to several personal factors, he was motivated by

an ambition to be a playwright with an audience and a fascination with literary adventures (such as the possibility of being the father of a new literature in an ancient language), a sense of rejection as an Irish Catholic by English culture and the hope of acceptance within Ireland as a distinguished national figure. Within and above these threadlike factors there was the hovering design of the great spider spinning its self-pleasing thread even while being suspended by it.

Moore was going to expose himself to that disease "fatal to Englishmen and doubly fatal to Irishmen": Ireland. The result was his masterpiece, the three-part memoir called *Hail and Farewell*.

This memoir, which weighs in at just under seven-hundred pages, is rambling, to be dipped into, thumbed through, set down, and picked up again later. But for anyone wishing to get the flavor of upper-middle-class Anglo-Irish Dublin when the Irish Literary Revival was coming into flower, it remains the essential on-the-ground book to read. This despite Moore's ill-tempered dismissal of the revival: "There is no literary revival. There is only one man, Mr. Synge, and he has written only one really beautiful play, 'The Well of the Saints.'" It is a book of quarrels: Moore's quarrel with the materialistic England to which he owed his success, with his brother, with Yeats, with his lifelong friend Edward Martyn, but particularly with Roman Catholicism. This is a

subject where Moore carries on at tiresome lengths. It was the major bee in GM's bonnet, and his animadversions on the church obviously carried over into his conversation. Nancy Cunard noted:

even those who disliked him or whom he made uncomfortable could not deny that he was a beautiful conversationalist. Yet the subjects, the subjects! Was it really permissible to go on so much, for instance, about Catholicism, in such a flippant vein?

It almost sinks *Hail and Farewell*, as it threatens to sink even the novel *A Drama in Muslim*. Many historians argue that the church saved the Irish people through centuries of hard times and British domination. Moore felt that it was a millstone around Ireland's neck. With all its carryings-on about Ireland's ancient myths and heroes, the revival can be seen as a last-ditch effort by the Protestant ruling class, having lost the Land Wars of the nineteenth century, to define Irishness in a way that would eliminate the Catholic Church from the picture, and thus include themselves at the center. "The plot of the trilogy as a whole," Frazier writes,

is really a conceit: Moore comes to Ireland on a mission, like an aesthetic St. Paul or St. Patrick; but his aim is to save the Irish *from* Catholicism. . . . Through the whole trilogy . . . there repeatedly sounds a requiem to the Irish Ascendancy, passing away amid eccentric plans for regeneration, while the Roman Catholic Church builds an empire on its ruins.

Religion and politics aside, *Hail and Farewell* is a great book of gossip, table talk, and fascinating portraits. There was no moment of the day during which Moore stopped being a writer, and it is not surprising that he "spoke of Dublin," as Frazier puts it, "not as home but as his 'workshop.'" His life was "copy." Thus, GM was a bit of a cad in his books as in his life. Ely Place, where Moore lived, was a choice address, and he gave memorable dinner

parties, with rare wines that seldom made it over to provincial Dublin. After dinner, one guest noted, "Moore listened, smoking his cigar, and, unlike his guest, seldom lifting the wine-glass to his lips." The artist Sarah Purser said of Moore, "Some men kiss and tell; Moore tells but doesn't kiss." George Russell (AE) wrote to the literary and artistic patron John Quinn in New York: "one half of Dublin is afraid it will be in [*Hail and Farewell*], and the other is afraid that it won't." As with many writers, betrayal came easily to Moore, and his remarks on Edward Martyn's sexual predilections are an early example of "outing." Though he promised Martyn that "on the subject . . . there is not a word in my book, I assure you." In fact, however, Martyn's little ways are a running gag throughout the book. Noting the small harmonium in Martyn's rooms, Moore surmises: "one can only think it serves to give the keynote to a choir-boy." "Every Saturday night," Frazier summarizes, "before the Sunday performance of his specially endowed Palestrina choir at Dublin's Pro-Cathedral, Edward takes a boy home to listen to his singing."

As for Moore himself, Adrian Frazier judges him to be "a homosexual man who loved to make love to women." Anomalous as this definition of George Moore may be, it is no more anomalous than many other things about him, and it may make some sense of the pleasure he took in torturing poor Edward Martyn in print. Moore analyzed his own sexual nature as follows:

Never before me has the soul of a man been so embroiled with that of a woman, and to explain the abnormality of my sexual sympathy for women, I can only imagine that before my birth there was some hesitation in the womb about the sex. Nevertheless, I was a happy boy and excellent sportsman: once I had a horse between my legs or a gun in my hands, I left behind all those morbid imaginations, all strange desires to travesty women, to wear their little boots and peignoirs.

Frazier comments: "That horse and gun are

good: there were plenty of conscious jokes about 'phallic symbols' before Freud."

Born to the life of a country gentleman, Moore quickly surmised that fulfillment for him lay elsewhere. The life of a writer meant renouncing the ideal of the gentleman, which was still a powerful force. Yeats saw and disapproved of Moore's lack of gentlemanly discretion when he first read *Ave*, remarking "there isn't the smallest recognition of the difference between public and private life" in the book. Moore's weakness for cruel gossip was merely the underside of an artistic credo that leads Frazier to identify his subject as one of the first modernists. Significantly, the first thing Moore did when he went to Paris as a young man was to send his valet home: "his presence stood between me and myself; I wished above all things to be myself Myself was the goal I was making for, instinctively if you will, but still making for it." He praised Manet because, though the painter had been "born in what is known as refined society," and was "in dress and appearance" an aristocrat, he was savvy enough to "avoid polite society."

Moore as an Irish nationalist differs from others in the movement by his complete lack of idealism and patriotic sentiment. It was not some revolutionary utopian temperament that led Moore to observations on the disgraceful inequalities of Irish life like those I have quoted from *A Drama in Dublin*. Perhaps it was having been brought up with an insider's view of the frivolity and lack of social responsibility of the Anglo-Irish class that emboldened him in his condemnation of the way power was exercised in the country, but the position was obvious. Moore knew his inherited class had no future—certainly not in Ireland. Adrian Frazier has produced an exhaustive, well-written and thorough biography of this singular man, whose greatest creation, over and above the millions of words he wrote in the course of a long, laborious career, was that unique and asymmetrical man, George Moore.

Three poems

by Deborah Warren

Clay & flame

*Nature . . . has mixed us of clay and
flame, of brain and mind.*

—William James

Up from the mineral and mud and ore,
from mildew and bacterium
and mold and thallophyte and spore
to fungus, rust, and diatom;

from moss and fern and flowering seed
to coral, fluke, and sponge, and from
flatworm and snail and centipede
to swamp to land until we come

to mouse, to monkey—to the brain
that grew in tandem with the thumb:
To tell exactly how we came
from clay is easy. But explain
the place inside the cranium
where all that clay turns into flame.

Prepositions

After, about, above, across, among—
around the table, bent upon cognition
just by rote, she paces with a long
list of prepositions:

A catalogue of locus and direction,
poky words so insignificant
you don't identify them by inspection
but mnemonic chant.

What's a preposition? If I ask,
she rolls her eyes and drops the book and frowns
into the mirror (*there's* her proper task):
"It's, like, before a noun."

Are girls—or kitchen tables—absolute?
Although they ought to easily exist
without the donkey-words that constitute
her stupid little list,

where would the table be without the *on*
that lets it touch the cool linoleum?
And what about the clever girl who cons
the word list? She'd become

irrelevant to everyone. Apart
from words for ways that things are relative
to other things, she'll have to learn by heart
how what she can't perceive

dim as electrons—what's beneath, beyond
her, asinine as prepositions—tethers
verbs and nouns and pretty flesh and bonds
the actual together.

Dido, it would have ended anyway

Dido, it would have ended anyway.
Command the sun to linger at its crest
in hot abeyance—order noon to stand
stopped, as if there isn't any west—
maybe you can get it to obey.
Not love. There's never been an almanac
that tells when an Aeneas (overdue
in Latium) will leave. No, faithfulness
is for Achates: Love? It barely tops
its hottest summer height before it drops—
as your desire—burnt out—would have, too.
Try something easier, for practice; try
to anchor the daylight and hold the bright ship back
that carries the sun across the windy sky.

A trifle & a substantial

by *Mark Steyn*

I should declare my bias up front: I have a strong antipathy towards theater restaurants—Sardi's, Joe Allen's, The Ivy in London, and all the other eateries favored by members of the theatrical profession over the years. I have dined at some pretty swank joints in my time and, let me tell you, Buckingham Palace isn't half as hung up on placement and precedence as the average showbiz hang-out. There is the area for the professionals and the area for the civilians, and they are ruthlessly demarcated. When I was a young man about town, I'd occasionally dine with a producer or an actress or some such at Joe Allen's. We'd be ushered past the nobodies and into the elite area, where Joan Collins once stumbled and fell on top of me. The next week I'd take a young lady to the theater, we'd drop by Joe's afterwards, the maitre d' would say, "How nice to see you again"—and then he'd seat us in the losers' section! Even worse, tall celebrities of one's acquaintance would spot you across the crowded room and wave sympathetically. After years of therapy, I've learned not to dwell on these humiliations, so let me say simply that theatrical restaurants bring out the Rosa Parks in me.

However, the above-mentioned establishments at least delineate their bantustans discreetly. At the so-called Polish Tea Room in the Hotel Edison in Manhattan, they don't mess around: the VIP area is roped off. There is, of course, something inherently absurd about a roped-off VIP section in a

pleasantly down-at-heel lobby coffee shop with formica tables, where the blintzes are accompanied by the incessant clatter of dishes from the other side of the hatch and the show posters are too faded to distract attention from the shabby walls. The Polish Tea Room is officially the Café Edison but no one calls it that, preferring instead the droll allusion to the fancier Russian Tea Room as an homage to the longtime proprietors, Polish émigrés Frances and Harry Edelstein. According to when you drop by, you may see matinee ladies slurping borscht before the show, or spot a couple of very, very vaguely familiar actors, or you may even find Neil Simon himself: for decades, he's used it as his in-town haunt, his preferred meeting place for get-togethers with his long-time producer Manny Azenberg. There's plenty of times, though, you can go in there and no one present will be in any way connected with the performing arts, unless you count being a Ninth Avenue hooker or a Times Square panhandler as being in show business. But that's okay. These days, there isn't a big enough "theater community" to fill the joint.

Neil Simon has now written a play about the Polish Tea Room—"the last bastion of what used to be the greatness of the Broadway theater," as one character says. "Neil had the idea to place the play here for very specific reasons," his director Jerry Zaks told *Newsday*. "You get such an extraordinary

cross-section. Tourists, office workers, theater people, theater owners, writers, and what they all have in common when they're here—it's such a cliché, but you become family." Nonetheless: that rope. Not many families have VIP sections and, when he swings by the Polish Tea Room, Mr. Simon sits in the reserved area, observing the rest of the family from safely behind the rope.

In *45 Seconds from Broadway* (playing across the street—technically, if you use the back entrance—at the Richard Rodgers on Forty-sixth), Frances and Harry have been renamed Zelda and Bernie, and John Lea Beatty, Simon's designer, has created a reasonably accurate approximation of the coffee shop, with only the VIP rope missing. Where Neil Simon chooses to sit for lunch is his business, but he makes it ours when he decides to write a play about the place. And somehow the omission of the rope seems telling. It's the first clue that this will be an airbrushed valentine to Broadway. To be sure, one expects a bit of that in this sort of territory, but most of us wouldn't want to write an elegy for a fading world without capturing some of the truth of it. The pitfalls of trying to observe it from the VIP section are encapsulated in such thinly drawn characters as Megan Woods (Julie Lund), an aspiring actress who's just arrived in crazy, exciting New York from Ohio. Half-a-century ago in *Wonderful Town*, another young hopeful got off the bus and sang "Why-oh-why-oh-why-oh/ Why did I ever leave Ohio?" but she at least had the consolations of Bernstein, Comden, and Green to define her. Even as stock types, there's something tatty—and even fundamentally wrong—about Simon's *dramatis personae* here. Aside from Megan, they include Mickey Fox (Lewis J. Stadlen), a Jewish comedian not so much based on Jackie Mason as swiped wholesale. The rest are there to serve as Mickey's straight men. There is a West End producer over from London (Dennis Creaghan) and a young black playwright from South Africa who becomes a waiter (Kevin Carroll) and two matinee ladies

(Alix Korey, Judith Blazer) and a grande dame with a silent husband (Marian Seldes, Bill Moor) and a black actress (Lynda Gravatt) who seems to be there mainly because her name is a gag set-up. It's Bessie. "Where's Porgy?," quips Mickey. This being Broadway, he immediately explains: "My whole act is racist. If you want to stamp it out, you first bring it out in the open."

That's the show in a nutshell: lame gags crippled further by a neurotic anxiousness not to offend and, indeed, to be seen to be not offending. Something very odd is going on when an author feels such a need to sugarcoat every single character, even the acerbic stand-up. *45 Seconds from Broadway* doesn't have anything one could call a plot, and not because Simon is experimenting with form or embarking on any other innovation: the only reason he doesn't have a plot is because he never got around to one or never saw the need for it. It does have a hit title, a neat play on George M. Cohan's smash of 1906, *Forty-five Minutes from Broadway*. It's as if Simon came up with the Edison idea, landed on a dandy title, and figured the rest would take care of itself. It never does. Instead, *45 Seconds* takes place across four Broadway seasons, in the course of which nothing dramatic happens except for a handful of threads that Simon picks at in a desultory fashion: The British producer is hoping to get the Jewish comic to appear in London. Cue a couple of jokes about the differences between British and American menu items: "I don't want a trifle. I want a substantial," says Mickey. Bernie (Louis Zorich) has been planning to sell the joint behind Zelda's back so he can go to Florida. Zelda (Rebecca Schull) hates Florida. Mickey has some tense moments with his elder brother Harry (David Margulies). These are among the play's few authentic moments, perhaps because they seem to owe something to the author's relationship with his own brother, Danny Simon.

As these threads are pursued, one couple of characters falls silent and another takes up the burden of the dialogue. This artificial structural device appears to serve no pur-

pose, except that by metaphorically roping off the characters from each other Simon saves himself a whole lot of trouble. Even the names sound fake. The South African playwright is called Solomon Mantutu, which in a Rider-Haggard-meets-famous-Archbishop kind of way you could proudly get away with, if the character weren't so faintly delineated that the moniker sticks out and draws attention to itself.

What Simon does do well is Jackie Mason shtick. Ordering for the Brit and himself, Mickey tells Bernie, "Give us each a peach cobbler. Cut it in half. He'll have the peach, I'll have the cobbler. Tell the cobbler not to make the shoes too tight." Lewis J. Stadlen, whom I last saw years ago playing Groucho Marx, turns in another highly detailed physical and vocal impression, aided by Simon's ear for the remorseless rhythms of Mason's delivery. But, if you want Jackie Mason jokes, you go to a Jackie Mason show. When someone builds a play around him, it's not unreasonable to assume it's for a purpose.

Simon was writing gags for comics half a century ago, as a staffer on Sid Caesar's show. He became a playwright because he wanted to do more—still using gags, but now as offensive weapons (*The Sunshine Boys*) or emotional shields (*Chapter Two*). By the time of his autobiographical trilogy in the Eighties, he'd even figured out a way both to acknowledge their limitations and to turn them to his advantage: the family members in the Brighton Beach plays use jokes when they wish to avoid communication. Taking Simon at his word—that he wanted to send a valentine to what's left of the old Broadway—and assuming the decision to forego plot was a conscious one, you search for some trajectory in the yuks, a dramatic arc in the shtick—a touch of John Osborne's *Entertainer* or even Noel Coward's *Red Peppers*. But there is absolutely nothing going on—either on the surface, where Coward's characters live, or below it, where Osborne's do. As one of the matinee ladies says apropos her latest outing, "It

wasn't a play. It was two people talking. He said something. She said something. And at the end, nobody said anything."

If this is Simon's new formula, it needs work. He fleshes it out in a little bit of advice Mickey Fox gives Solomon Mantutu: "What I try to do is hit them in the kishkas," he says. "I wouldn't arouse their conscience too much. There's people in the audience anxious to go home and have sex." If one were to seek meaning in this exchange, it would be as an encounter of Broadway archetypes: the ethnic crowdpleaser and the ethnic conscience, the laugh-a-minute and the plonkingly earnest. But if Simon is making a case for the gagmeister, he fails. Our kishkas are never in any danger of being hit. The wisecracks crack and splinter and crumble to nothing, mouthed by cut-outs for whom nothing is at stake.

This is Simon's thirty-first play, and his batting average, unmatched by any other American author, has taken a hit in recent years. There was nothing British about *London Suite*, and nothing French about *The Dinner Party*, set in Paris. So Simon has retreated to a world he knows—Broadway—and astonishingly there's nothing Broadway about *45 Seconds from*. The indelible image is the one the play avoided: the roped-off VIP section, behind which sits Simon, roped off from the experiences all authors need. After all, the most important decision any writer makes is the first: What do you write about? "Write what you know," say the correspondence courses, though many successful writers didn't (Shakespeare). And, in any case, what do writers know? Mordecai Richler, discussed in these pages in September, quit London in the early Seventies and returned to Quebec because after twenty years in one of the world's great cities he'd wound up living in an upscale neighborhood and what he knew were other novelists, Fleet Street critics, BBC producers, film directors, television hosts. In other words, he had nothing to write about. Back home, he hung out with plumbers, lawyers, snowplow operators, bank executives, the great unruly mass

of humanity. E. L. Doctorow faced the same problem and resolved it rather ingeniously: after weeks of sitting down at his desk and staring at the wall, he decided to write about, as he puts it, the wall—the bricks and mortar, the house, the era in which it was built, the kind of people who first lived in it, the town as it was back then. The result was *Ragtime*, a swarming panorama of America in the early years of the last century.

Both Richler and Doctorow were aware of the problem, as Simon surely must be after his recent reviews. He was the colossus of Broadway by the Sixties, an efficient hit-maker who understood how to mine the slenderest concept—two guys move in together—into a smash play, and then film, and then TV series (*The Odd Couple*). By the late Seventies, as the only living Broadway playwright to become a bankable name in the wider world, he understood the easy, starry compilations—*Plaza Suite*, *California Suite*—had all but run their course and dug a little deeper into himself to emerge with three autobiographical plays that anchored the jokes in some kind of personal reality. A decade ago, he produced a flawed farce, *Rumors*, that nevertheless required tighter plotting than he'd traditionally attempted and suggested a writer still inclined to stretch himself. Since then? Well, it was obvious with *London Suite* that he'd run out of things to write about. The critics said so, and audiences agreed, and, as Simon must ruefully acknowledge, there's nothing sadder than an uncommercial commercial playwright.

His new play is lavished with A-list talent, from Marian Seldes, who can do nothing with the material, to David Margulies, who's always a pleasure and cheers things up no end. Simon's producers wouldn't sign Jerry Zaks and a big expensive cast and book the Rodgers, a big house for a straight play, if they didn't think Simon still capable of the musical-sized smashes he delivered for three decades.

He lives in California these days, and I don't know much about how he spends his

days, but they would seem to be within the conventional parameters of the celebrity life. Thirty years ago, he became a devoted admirer of Mildred Newman, the author of the protean self-help manual *How to be Your Own Best Friend*. By the Nineties, he was sick of her and his play *Jake's Women* contained a savage portrait of a platitude-spouting shrink who writes self-help manuals with titles like *Love Yourself, Fuck Them*. Having stiffed an out-of-favor therapist, he seems to have run out of contacts in the human race.

By contrast, Melissa James Gibson, at thirty-six, is just starting out. Her first play [*sic*] was initially produced by Steppenwolf in Chicago four years ago and is now off-Broadway at the tiny SoHo Rep, way downtown a few blocks from Ground Zero. The play follows a trio of apartment house neighbors in their twenties who've come to make it in the big city, much as Megan Woods does in *45 Seconds*. I was late seeing [*sic*] and, from the reviews I read, especially the quoted lines, I felt sure I wouldn't like it. But Miss Gibson has done something very adroit—she's written a play of slick Simonesque lines that also convey the insecurities and youthful spirit and communal solidarity behind the jokes.

The three characters meet coincidentally, as people do in the city, and their friendship is intensified when two seek out sublets in the apartment house of the third. Babette (Christina Kirk) is working on a book with a quirky theory of world history. On one side of her pad lives Frank (James Urbaniak), a gay man who wants to be an auctioneer and so practices by talking in tongue twisters ("Please pardon my partially purple paisley pants"). On the other side is Theo (Dominic Fumusa), a moody composer whose first commission is from an amusement park which needs a tune for one of its rides, the Thrill-O-Rama. His doomy clankings close each scene. These twenty-somethings are the sort of people who might one day wind up on Broadway, though perhaps not intentionally, but for

now they're at that post-college stage where they're doing jobs that might one day lead to something. So Theo is happy to defend ironically his commission in artistic terms: "Are you saying the average pimply prepubescent doesn't deserve a real musical score for his amusement park ride experience?" We don't know whether in forty years' time Theo will be a hack writer of theme-park jingles or a composer of opera. At this point, there's none of that disillusionment that comes a few years later when you realize the things you did because they might lead to something only led to other things that might lead to something but never did. Surprisingly few authors write about the mid-twenties. At the time, you don't have the perspective on it. Ten years later, you have events and experiences to write about and it's hard to recapture a time when your world was formed mostly by anticipation and potential. I think Miss Gibson has done it extraordinarily well, rather like the panache of very early Coward (in the Twenties, when he was one of the bright young things of the demi-monde).

The dialogue is written in smart lines: "If you can spell bourgeois, then you're bourgeois," says Babette. The point isn't whether the sentiment is true or not, but rather that for enclaves of young, articulate people a

shared language—the codes, the puns, the rituals, the catchphrases—is what binds them and to some extent defines them. The setbacks of the day—landlord problems—are an opportunity for parlour games: "What rhymes with 'letter of eviction'?" The exhibitionist cleverness is in fact a rather simple melodic line, the surface of the play; the real drama lies in the harmonies underneath—the melancholy and confusion and zest underpinning the jokes. That's what the three principals play, in endearingly deadpan style. Daniel Aukin's production honors the literateness of the script, but also has a great confidence in simple stage pictures. Louise Thompson has provided an enjoyably squalid set that positions the young adults between contrasting visions of the future—an eccentric octogenarian above and a bickering couple below. Whether you recognize yourself in any of these three wannabe urbanites facing their "quarter-life crisis" depends on your particular set of experiences, but they leap on stage fully-formed and plausible, which is more than one can say for any of the sentimental caricatures in *45 Seconds from Broadway*. How Miss Gibson will sound in thirty plays' time I've no idea, but this is an impressive New York debut. To modify Neil Simon's joke, it's both a trifle and a substantial.

Art

New York's newest gem: the Neue Galerie

by Karen Wilkin

More than thirty years ago, when I was a graduate student, a college classmate and her husband took me to meet a friend of theirs. I remember almost nothing about the evening except entering the apartment and being stunned by the sight of two walls double-hung with first-rate Egon Schiele drawings. Who was our host? Serge Sabarsky, a name that would be attached, within a few years, to a Madison Avenue gallery dedicated to Austrian and German Expressionism. There it was soon evident that the man with all the amazing Schiele drawings was as rigorous in selecting the art he offered for sale as in choosing the works he lived with. The gallery's reputation quickly grew.

Then, in the 1970s when I was a fledgling curator at a small museum, eager to do shows more ambitious than our limited resources permitted, I found that the Sabarsky Gallery would occasionally lend works more significant than I had any right to hope for, thanks to its director's passion for the art he exhibited and his desire to inspire that passion in others. My having been introduced to him by my classmate helped, of course, and I confess to, for several years, taking shameless advantage of the combination of Sabarsky's generosity and my luckily enhanced credentials. As time went on, though, I concentrated more and more on shows of American modernism and although I continued to visit the gallery because of its always interesting exhibits, I saw

little of its silver-haired, unfailingly charming director. He was no longer to be found behind the desk or answering the phone, as he almost invariably had been in the early years. When I read of his death in 1996, I was startled to realize that I wasn't sure when I had last seen him. But the image of those rows of Schiele drawings in the Sabarsky apartment remained as vivid as ever.

That image was revived a couple of weeks ago, when I made my first visit to the latest addition to the New York museum world, the Neue Galerie. I knew that the museum was the fulfillment of a long cherished dream of Sabarsky's, a dream shared and encouraged by Ronald S. Lauder. The two men had collaborated to make the project a reality. In 1994, they acquired a superb Carrère & Hastings mansion on East 86th Street as a future home for their museum, and, after Sabarsky's death, Lauder completed the task of creating the Neue Galerie, as a tribute to the man who had been, for almost thirty years, a fellow lover of German and Austrian modernism, a sometime mentor, an occasional source of outstanding works, and above all, a close friend. As I entered the elegantly restored Beaux-Arts building, admired the Josef Hoffmann-style benches in the lobby, and climbed the staircase, I was full of expectations. I crossed the sumptuous former drawing room, briefly savored a fine selection of Gustav Klimt landscapes and turned right. A smallish gal-

lery filled with an impeccably chosen group of drawings and watercolors by Schiele and his colleagues instantly transported me back to the excitement of that first, long-ago visit to the Sabarsky apartment. And as I explored this little gem of a museum, that excitement kept mounting. My high expectations were more than met.

As a place to look at art, the Neue Galerie is ravishing, its handsomely proportioned exhibition spaces, the work of the architect Annabelle Selldorf, a subtle fusion of unintrusive but faultlessly detailed modern insertions and the lavish appointments of the original 1914 décor. For the inaugural exhibition, “New Worlds: German and Austrian Art, 1890–1940,”¹ the subtly restored opulent rooms of the second floor are devoted to turn-of-the-century Austrian paintings, works on paper, furniture, and decorative art, in a surprisingly effective juxtaposition that suggests that the elaborations of Beaux-Arts design and the overheated aspects of fin-de-siècle Viennese modernism were more seamlessly connected than one might have suspected. The relentlessly patterned backgrounds of a pair of Gustav Klimt figure paintings or the sinuous curves of an Adolf Loos chair, the luxurious wood and exotic inlay of an Otto Wagner chest or the opulent polychromy of a brooch by Josef Hoffmann take on new meanings when they are seen against Carrère & Hastings’s classical pilasters. A more wide-ranging selection of German works, from paintings, drawings, and watercolors of the Blaue Reiter, the Brücke, and the Neue Sachlichkeit—“the New Objectivity”—to paintings and furniture from the Bauhaus, is installed in the clean new galleries of the third floor. The installation

delicately underlines the contrast between the uncompromising, slightly aggressive nature of this work and the more florid qualities of its Austrian equivalent.

Everything on view comes from the combined holdings of Sabarsky himself—whose collection forms the core of the museum—a “private collection, New York”—presumably Lauder or his brother, who also specializes in the period—and the burgeoning collection of the Neue Galerie itself. It is a perfectly wonderful assembly, comprehensive enough to be encyclopedic and idiosyncratic enough to be personal, and, for the most part, of outstanding quality throughout. The high point is unquestionably the Neue Galerie’s recently acquired knock-out Max Beckmann, *Self-Portrait with Horn* (1938), a riveting picture that more than held its own among a remarkable group of the painter’s most ferocious late triptychs in the 1997 exhibition, “Beckmann in Exile,” at the downtown Guggenheim. At the Neue Galerie, this juicily painted, brooding image of the painter as carnival musician in a striped robe shares the wall with a 1923 self-portrait as man about town, in evening clothes and bowler hat, a cigar delicately held between thick fingers. The suave modeling and cool, ironic detachment of the earlier work underscores Beckmann’s initial affinity with the painters of the Neue Sachlichkeit—the trenchant Georg Grosz and Otto Dix, or the prurient Christian Schad, for example—whose works are installed on an adjoining wall. The intensity and painterly physicality of the later picture declare Beckmann’s independence from the movement and stake his claim to being one of the most powerful painters of his generation.

Self-Portrait with Horn, like all of Beckmann’s mature work, is notable for its rich, slightly abrasive palette—here a range of salmon pinks and orange-reds play against velvety blacks—and for its vigorous, nuanced touch. It’s notable, too, for the way Beckmann links the figure’s massive bullet head and the interrupted curves of the instrument he holds, oddly, between mouth

¹ “New Worlds: German and Austrian Art, 1890–1940” opened at the Neue Galerie New York on November 9, 2001 and remains on view until February 18, 2002. A catalogue of the exhibition, edited by Renée Price, has been published by the museum in association with DuMont Verlag (600 pages, \$75).

and ear, and then squeezes this chain of arcs between geometric elements that restate the rectangular shape of the canvas. The resulting tension—a compression that threatens to become claustrophobic—turns what might be just another one of the painter's habitual "costume" self-portraits into an uncomfortable exercise in self-scrutiny. Yet for all its undertones of modern anxiety, the picture powerfully evokes the past, specifically the seventeenth-century tradition of the allegory of the senses, in which a seemingly anecdotal image of a musician becomes emblematic of the sense of hearing. What situates *Self-Portrait with Horn* firmly in the last troubled century is the figure's unnerving, sideways gaze.

Self-Portrait with Horn is, as they say, a hard act to follow, but there are many other pleasures at the Neue Galerie. In the German section, Wassily Kandinsky is particularly well represented. An explosive 1913 watercolor, all floating blots and agitated scrawls, does everything any of his canvases of the period could do, but with more energy and fluency; a vibrant 1908 Murnau streetscape and a 1911 transitional painting trace the painter's path towards the abstraction of the 1913 watercolor. The pair of Kurt Schwitterses on view, a little painting on glass and a "Merz picture" constructed with remarkably robust elements, is a nice surprise. One could wish for better Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's or more surprising Paul Klees, but in compensation there are prime examples of Erich Heckel and Max Pechstein, both from about 1910, all clashing, acidic hues and slashing drawing. (My college friend remembers that the Heckel, a reclining adolescent nude whose knowing look and provocative pose seem wholly at odds with the doll she holds, always hung in the Sabarsky living room.) A 1919 head by Emil Nolde is also hard to ignore, a bold, forthright image at once slightly atypical and absolutely characteristic of the artist's fierce color and brutal brushwork. Together, these works leave no doubt about German Expressionism's debt to Fauvism, Cubism, and tribal art. They leave no

doubt, either, about the way the artists of the Blaue Reiter and the Brücke used intensified hues and simplified, angular shapes not, as their French colleagues did, to create non-literal equivalents for heightened perceptions, but rather, to suggest their independence from bourgeois values.

The Austrian section has its own unexpected delights. The Klimt landscapes (cousins of the Museum of Modern Art's well-known canvas of dense, leafy trees) give us this problematic painter at his best. These outdoor scenes make explicit his awareness of turn-of-the-century French painting, their layered surfaces and frontal compositions suggesting that he looked hard—and profitably—at the work of Monet and of Van Gogh, among others. Landscape as subject seemed to save Klimt from himself or at least to channel his worst instincts into something healthier. The complexity of the natural world, with its multiplicity of leaves and grasses, and its prismatic reflections, offered him a compelling reason to indulge his *horror vacui*—his apparently unappeasable desire to subdivide and embellish—so that when he translates a view of a housefront overgrown with ivy or an expanse of trees into a green mosaic, the result seems logical and personal, instead of purely willful, as it does in his overwrought figure paintings. There's an interesting lesson to be learned from the difference between the Klimt landscapes at the Neue Galerie and the two slightly later paintings of standing women, trapped against airless, insistently patterned backgrounds, apparently victimized by their intricate clothes.

Perhaps the best surprise in the selection of Austrian works is *Portrait of a Man on the Lawn* (1907, private collection, New York), by Richard Gerstl, one of the most gifted, original, and least known members of the Austrian expressionist movement. At its best, Gerstl's work might be described as a prefiguration of an uneasy marriage between Fairfield Porter and Frank Auerbach. A suicide at the age of twenty-five, Gerstl apparently left fewer than a hundred surviv-

ing works—that figure includes his drawings—so the presence of this energetic major canvas, with its luminous color and boldly stroked impasto is a real coup for the Neue Galerie. (It's worth noting that the provenance of this picture indicates that it once belonged to the Serge Sabarsky Gallery.)

One of this delightful new museum's nicest qualities is its size: large enough to allow for ambitious exhibitions, small enough to permit visitors to concentrate on work that demands close attention. That's important, because drawings and works on paper are among the real strengths of the opening exhibition. The second-floor room to the right as you enter the salon is a sort of textbook of Austrian drawing in the years before the First World War. Schiele's full range is represented in the selection of watercolors: not just the usual feverish images of available women and bad boy naked self-portraits, but relaxed, closely observed portraits of friends—including one of the composer Arnold Schönberg and one of a lively, dark-eyed woman in a white blouse and blue shawl—plus a spiky flower piece, and more. Our sense of the period is enlarged by the proximity of drawings by Schiele's near contemporary Oskar Kokoschka, and by Klimt, who was a generation older. The combination makes clear how closely linked all three artists were. Still, each emerges as a very distinct individual, despite the superficial likeness of their choice of subject and their common belief that drawing was often a matter of sharp, crisp contour and expressive placement. No one could confuse Kokoschka's dry, economical drawings of bony young girls, pared down to edges and sparing notes of tone, with Schiele's meticulously inflected figures, with their contrasts of incisive line, nervous modeling, and liquid pools of color, nor could anyone confound either of the younger men's efforts with Klimt's fluid, relaxed, curvilinear translations of the figure into interlocking shapes.

Disappointments? Almost none. There's

little sculpture, apart from a Wilhelm Lehmbruch bust. Lovis Corinth is represented only by a drawing—a wonderful, smudged, urgent self-portrait, to be sure, but still meager evidence of his powers as an expressive manipulator of pigment. But the inaugural exhibition is simply the tip of the proverbial iceberg. The ambitious catalogue that accompanies the show indicates that there are many more first-rate works to be shown, including a good selection of Corinth canvases and another Gerstl portrait, this from Sabarsky's own collection. In the meantime, the works currently on view offer plenty to look at and plenty to think about. And for sheer quantity and quality, the furniture and the examples of applied art in the opening exhibition are pretty dazzling. A 1908 ziggurat-like drawing cabinet in ebony, boxwood, and mother-of-pearl marquetry, designed by the Viennese Eduard Josef Wimmer-Wisgrill, manages to compete with the Schiele, Klimt, and early Kokoschka drawings in that second floor gallery—which is no mean accomplishment. Cult figures such as Hoffmann and Joseph Urban are well represented, and the selection of Bauhaus furniture inspires acquisitiveness. It includes original versions of both iconic pieces still in production and less familiar ones, such as a chaise and a row of fold-up theater seats by Marcel Breuer that one hopes present-day designers will study carefully. (For the truly acquisitive, the gallery shop offers reproductions of some of the more desirable utilitarian objects on view.) And don't miss the Willi Baumeister poster announcing a 1927 design exhibition; it shows an interior very much like the original furnishings of the Neue Galerie's mansion—cancelled out with a red "X."

As I said, there's a lot to look at and a lot to take in. For study at home, there is a massive catalogue that, I suspect, may be the currently definitive volume on the material under review, a compendium of essays on each of the artists and designers in the collection by a roster of international specialists. It's rather hard to navigate, both

because of its heft and because it is organized by sections and subsections dealing with places, periods, and movements, within which individual artists are presented chronologically. You have to keep going back to the table of contents to figure out what is where in the checklists—which include meticulous entries documenting the provenance, exhibition history, and literature of each work in the collection to date—since these invaluable compilations follow each subsection of essays and plates, and the artists listed in them are not arranged alphabetically. But it's worth the effort to find one's way through this rather daunting book, since the essays are useful combinations of critical discussion and biography, with special emphasis on the history of each artist's reception in the

United States. The colorplates are generally good, the comparative material informative, and the documentary photographs fascinating. As I said, it will probably serve as the essential general reference text for some time to come.

Good as the catalogue is, it is, of course, no substitute for a visit to the Neue Galerie. That's a little hard to navigate, too, given a slightly erratic schedule of when the galleries are open to the public. (The bookstore and the onsite Viennese coffeehouse, Café Sabarsky, have more forgiving hours.) But getting to the Neue Galerie is more than worth the effort. It's a great addition to the city, a place that anyone who cares about the history of modernism will return to again and again.

Music

New York chronicle

by Jay Nordlinger

Does any work of music begin more gloriously than *Die Meistersinger*? James Levine handles it well, as he does all Wagner, and many other things, too. The Metropolitan Opera's *Meistersinger* was one of the great successes of the (still-young) season; it was also one of the great Wagner successes in recent memory.

With Levine, you get brisk Wagner, Wagner that moves along, Wagner that refuses to be weighed down, thinking itself profound. Levine's was both a Beethoven-like and a *springy* performance, if that is possible to say about Wagner, which, in this case, it is. The Met orchestra was (typically) splendid. The prelude to Act III was full of nobility and solemnity; not even some flubs in the horns could spoil it.

But *Meistersinger*, as much as any opera, belongs to the singers, and the Met had the stage packed with worthy ones. We will begin with the soprano, simply because she is the soprano, and used to top billing. That was Solveig Kringelborn, the Norwegian who had made a fine impression a few weeks before as Tatiana in *Eugene Onegin*. She made a good Eva here, hardly putting a foot wrong. There was just one, conspicuous wrong foot: an instance of flatness spoiled the climax of the great Act III quartet. But she made up for it shortly afterward with an exquisite sustained trill. The other female singer was the mezzo-soprano Jill Grove, outstanding as Magdalene. This is a big, bold voice, and Grove is a robust and

arresting singer. She seems a mezzo who could qualify for that most old-fashioned and rare of designations: contralto.

We should hasten to the men, though, for they own this opera. The main tenor—singing Walther—was Johan Botha, a South African (as the name must tell you). A true Wagnerian tenor is worth his weight in gold, and this one is worth a lot. Botha put on a clinic of clear, smooth, even, and correct singing. It was both heroic and lyrical. Botha appears to be the sort of person for whom singing comes naturally, lucky guy. Now and then, he just *slightly* pushed, in the upper register, bringing to mind Ben Heppner; but his Prize Song—Walther's great moment, and one of Wagner's—was magnificent. The other tenor, doing David, was Mathias Zachariassen, a Swede making his Met debut. He will be back, surely, as he was a most genial contributor, with an open and lovely sound.

But to the basses and bass-baritones, who really make *Die Meistersinger*! The German wonder René Pape was nearly perfect as Pogner. We have come to expect this from Pape. With him, one just sits back and relaxes, knowing that all will be well (or even better). The Beckmesser was Eike Wilm Schulte, who was no less perfect than Pape: his singing was clear and precise; his diction was exemplary; and his inhabitation of the character was complete. He gave us Beckmesser with both voice and body—and did so with zero hamming, an achievement. The

young Canadian bass-baritone John Relyea had the brief yet rewarding part of the night watchman; he was, as usual, rich-voiced and exciting, deserving his shower of applause.

Yet the number-one bass of this bassfest was the veteran James Morris, presenting his first Hans Sachs. Long an admired Scarpia and Wotan—to name but two of his roles—he proved a first-rate Sachs. Morris has some gray hair now, but he has plenty of singing left (which has sometimes been in doubt). His Sachs was haunting and endearing, tender and commanding, more lyrical than stentorian (a welcome surprise). He has always been a canny singer. He seems now the ideal age—and to have the ideal temperament—for Sachs.

This entire performance was infused with a high spirit, reflecting the qualities of the opera, which is playful, wordy, and ebullient, as well as wise. There was a chamber quality to Levine's direction; *Meistersinger*—strange though it may be to say—is both chamber opera and grand opera, both light and dense. The Met's performance was one of those giddy operatic events, in which everything comes together, in which everything clicks, in which there are no weak links. Every opera-lover in New York has been talking about it, and everyone who was there is glad he was.

One of the brightest ideas in concert life today is the pairing of Renée Fleming, soprano, and Jean-Yves Thibaudet, piano. Fleming is, simply, one of the best singers going; Thibaudet is one of the best pianists. They turn out to be excellent collaborators, as confirmed in their outing at Carnegie Hall.

They gave a program of Marx, Strauss, Debussy, and Rachmaninoff, mirroring their hit album stupidly titled *Night Songs* (a marketer's gotta do what a marketer's gotta do). One of the things this collaboration proves is that a first-rate pianist can make a serious difference in a vocal recital—the entire quality of the occasion is elevated. This is noticeable when the soprano Dawn Upshaw appears with Richard Goode: they are equal musicians, equal technicians, and

equal (or nearly equal) stars. One objection I have to these recitals, however—Fleming/Thibaudet, Upshaw/Goode—is that the pianist feels the need to play several solo pieces. Perhaps it is necessary for the pianist's ego; he is not a “mere” accompanist. And yet a vocal recital should be a vocal recital—there is no shame in that. The piano interludes unnecessarily prolong the evening, and come as a distraction. (I might add that Daniel Barenboim has done this with Plácido Domingo as well.)

It is hard to talk about Fleming without first talking about the voice. But is there anything left to say about it? It is rich, creamy, glorious, and altogether one of the best in the annals of singing. André Previn is one musician who states flatly: it is the best—ever. You and I need not go that far, but there is no denying the flabbergasting singularity of this instrument. The songs of Joseph Marx are made for Fleming—as they were made for Leontyne Price before her—and she does them entrancingly. She has her passel of mannerisms—but these are more in the nature of endearing characteristics. Thibaudet's effortless handling of the difficult Marx accompaniments made these songs a particular pleasure. (The soprano clearly understands how lucky she is. Toward the end of the evening, when announcing an encore, she said, “You can see that I've picked *easy* music, having Jean-Yves here.” She meant, with sweet sarcasm, that the sky was the limit with such a virtuoso on hand.)

In the first half of the program, Thibaudet played Liszt's Ballade No. 2 in B minor, a shocking piece of trash, even for Liszt. It is impossibly vulgar and unmusical, basically a bunch of technical exercises with some cheap melodies thrown in. It is curious that a pianist of Thibaudet's caliber would spend time on it, or impose it on an audience. But Thibaudet is a riveting pianist, so elegant and refined (capable of redeeming almost anything). In his playing—to touch on only one quality—nothing is wrongly accented; he has an extraordinary sense of line.

Then the two did a Richard Strauss set, concluding with the rapturous “Cäcilie,” one of Fleming’s signature songs, thrillingly sung. The Debussy group was superb—sensitive and moving—and then it was on to the Rachmaninoff, another soaringly romantic composer, ripe for Fleming. The first of the songs was the one whose title is rendered in English “In the Silence of Mysterious Night”; at the end of it, Fleming did a *ritardando* that Thibaudet clearly did not want—he was right. But the greatness of the voice makes up for any number of errors or dubiousness of interpretation. There is definitely a theatricality about Fleming, but she has a genuine musical sense, too.

One of the encores was “Marietta’s Lied” (as it is popularly known) from Korngold’s opera *Die Tote Stadt*. It was far too slow and self-indulgent, and Fleming’s intonation failed. There was also—this was a surprise—“Casta diva” from *Norma*, which Fleming sang in a most un-Bellini-like manner. She is not exactly a *bel canto* singer, but it was interesting to hear her assay this music. One could pick at Fleming and Thibaudet (in particular at the former), and I have done a little of that. But the truth is, their recital was an example of very high musicianship, and those in attendance—as with the Wagner—were privileged to have heard it.

The next afternoon saw another singer/pianist duo recital: the Polish contralto Ewa Podleś and the American pianist Garrick Ohlsson (a renowned Chopinist) performed at Alice Tully Hall. Podleś is at once a veteran singer and a new sensation. What I mean is, she is somewhere past mid-career—having enjoyed many years of success in Eastern Europe mainly—but she is a relative newcomer on the American scene, having caused a great stir a few seasons ago when she substituted at particular venues across the nation for (the frequently canceling) Cecilia Bartoli. Podleś is heralded as one of the truly complete singers of the world. That she is.

The first startling thing about her is the word after her name on the program: con-

tralto. She is the real deal, almost unique in that respect today. She and Ohlsson began their recital with a group of Rachmaninoff songs, some of which Fleming and Thibaudet had just done. Podleś has a phenomenal sound, adjustable to her musical purposes. She can be a little hooty or fuzzy—as she was before she really warmed up—but she is invariably interesting. Her singing of the Rachmaninoff was technically secure, musically persuasive. Ohlsson was a highly sympathetic partner. He played from memory, meaning that he could look at the singer rather than at a score, which made a difference.

After the Rachmaninoff, Ohlsson himself participated in more than an “interlude”: he gave no fewer than ten etudes for the piano by Scriabin. His playing had much to commend it. It had a beautiful singing line, for example, and some poetry, and an absence of falsity. It was *very* Chopinesque—in fact, maybe too much so. This was Scriabin without the Russian edge, those sharp elbows that make playing Russian. Ohlsson was like velvet, when a little sandpaper was called for. He was perfectly good—perfectly unobjectionable—mind you; but a certain spark or flavor was missing.

Mussorgsky’s *Nursery* songs have long been a favorite of imaginative singers, and Podleś did them brilliantly. She offered just the right mixture of characterization and musical respectability. Her semi-acting on the stage made one wish to see her in opera (her repertory is enormous). A second and final set of Rachmaninoff songs was soulful and penetrating. Here is, indeed, a complete singer, boasting a huge vocal range, intelligence, versatility, and a technique that we would describe as fantastically virtuosic if we were referring to an instrumentalist.

You have heard a lot of rhapsodic praise in this chronicle—but that is because there has been a lot of rhapsodically praisable musical performance in New York lately.

The Estonian Neeme Järvi is one of the most interesting conductors before the public now, the leader of both the Detroit

Symphony Orchestra and the Gothenburg Symphony in Sweden. He is a smart, lively musician with a spirit of adventure. He has made a particular mark in the music of the composers from the former Soviet Union—there is, unfortunately, no neater way of saying that—and in American music. He also spends as much time in the recording studio as any conductor.

In his guest outing with the New York Philharmonic, his main symphonic work was the Symphony No. 4 of Sergei Taneyev, a composer of the late nineteenth century. But first came the young American-Israeli violinist Gil Shaham in the Brahms concerto. This is a most capable and appealing violinist. He is extremely relaxed, with no feeling of labor or untoward exertion about him. The orchestra, sadly, was sloppy and limp for him—uncommitted. He, however, was very much committed. He must have played this work a thousand—a million?—times, yet he was determined not to “phone it in.” His tone was sweet or aggressive, as required. He meandered amiably when Brahms asked him to meander amiably, delivered fire where Brahms asked for that. There were some strange tempo problems in the Adagio—it was extremely “expansive,” to use what can be a polite word for “slow.” The final movement had the vigor and elegance it deserves.

Always, there is a look of enjoyment on Shaham’s face, and this is worth noting, because a joy and a pleasure come through in his music-making. His physical movements on stage can be annoying; he is no Heifetz, practically inert; he slides around like Michael Jackson. But we are talking, after all, about an aural art.

Taneyev was a Russian composer in that he was a composer who was Russian, but he was very much in the Germanic, or Central European, or “neutral” tradition. He was a revered academic who was a particular master of Baroque forms. The Symphony No. 4 is far from a great work, and it may not even be a good work, but it is surely worth a hearing. It has the virtue of allowing the orchestral players to show off some vir-

tuosity, as the Philharmonic players impressively did; sometimes they even played together. Järvi, in any case, is a valuable conductor, and, especially with the orchestras with whom he lives, he can bring off some exceptional performances.

The Met’s *Arabella* was poised to be one of the great Strauss evenings—and it proved to be so. It could hardly miss, featuring a great Straussian, Renée Fleming, and another excellent one, Barbara Bonney, and the worthy Strauss conductor Christoph Eschenbach in the pit. Eschenbach has worked with Fleming before, conducting her two Strauss discs, which feature songs and the major operatic excerpts. Bonney has worked with Fleming and Eschenbach, too. She and the mezzo-soprano Susan Graham back up the luscious soprano in the operatic excerpts, privately calling themselves “the Flemettes.”

Eschenbach—soon to take the reins of the Philadelphia Orchestra—is a bull-like conductor, tightly wound, sometimes frantic. His great energy aided *Arabella*, for it never dragged or languished, always keeping a pulse, though having its necessary bloom in the heavenly parts. *Arabella* can suffer from prettiness and preciousness; here, it was enchanting.

Barbara Bonney is one of the better Sophies in *Der Rosenkavalier*, and she makes an equally suitable Zdenka in this opera. Her singing is clear, clean, and accurate—fresh-scrubbed. Interestingly, she rather looks like she sings, or sings like she looks. The little-known American tenor Raymond Very contributed some shining singing as Matteo; he has a particularly beautiful upper register. Eric Halfvarson, as Count Waldner, lent an astonishingly big and arresting bass. The production’s Mandryka, Hans-Joachim Ketelsen, proved competent, though he was somewhat stiff in both his physical presentation and his singing. He could not quite hold up his end of the sublime Act II duet. But he strengthened later, and was not too awkward a mismatch with Fleming.

But Fleming! That voice was the dominant power of the evening. But the technical control that undergirds the voice should not be overlooked; her abdomen must be from Gold's Gym. She can act, too, as was especially apparent in the opera's final portion, where Arabella takes control of what is a most confused, quasi-farcical situation. Some record company should do us all a favor by letting Fleming, Bonney, and Eschenbach record *Arabella* complete (there is a relatively minor excerpt on the one disc). It is an opera filled with the wistfulness, longing, and satisfied resignation that the composer would apotheosize in his *Four Last Songs* (also recorded by Fleming and Eschenbach).

After so much rhapsodic praise, it would be only fitting to reiterate that this was, indeed, one of the great Strauss evenings, and that—where have I heard this before?—anyone who attended was lucky to have done so.

Concert note

Ivan Moravec,
at Carnegie Hall, New York.

The Czech pianist Ivan Moravec gave the final concert of his U.S. tour at Carnegie Hall on November 27th with a program of works by Janáček (*Sonata I.X.1905*), Debussy (the second of the *Estampes*, "La Soirée dans Grenade," and *Pour le Piano*), and Chopin (Ballade in F minor and, after intermission, the twenty-four *Preludes*). I was also lucky enough to hear him at the exquisite Middlebury College Center for the Arts (four-hundred seats) on November 18th. On that occasion, eight of Chopin's Mazurkas opened the program plus the Fantasia in F minor, with the Janáček and Debussy offerings after intermission. They were splendid concerts, and it cannot be entirely rude to inquire why this supreme pianist, at age seventy-one—justifiably included in the Philips set of the "Great Pianists of the Twentieth Century"—should find himself

giving recitals on this tour in such places as Richmond, Virginia; Portland, Maine; and Young Harris College in Georgia.

Born in Prague in 1930, he came to early maturity in postwar Czechoslovakia, where politics and artistic freedom collided ceaselessly—he never joined the party and thus his "so-called career" (his words) was constantly thwarted by the state booking agency. Nonetheless, great musicians recognized him early on. In the late 1950s Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli invited him to his informal school in Arezzo—Moravec fondly recalls the "3 x 40 minutes" of tutelage at the piano with the genial Italian, plus the copious vino. In 1962, two young Americans, co-owners of the fledgling Connoisseur Society, wrested Moravec from the clutches of the cultural bureaucrats, flew him to New York, and began a series of incomparable piano recordings done in various Manhattan locations with an exquisitely voiced Baldwin grand. These recordings of music by Chopin, Ravel, Debussy, Beethoven, and Brahms established Moravec's reputation as a supreme master of space, rubato, and stern, but still fiery, elegance. (They have been recently reissued by VAI.) Not surprisingly, George Szell gave him a welcome invitation to play Beethoven's Fourth Concerto with the Cleveland Orchestra in January 1964, followed by a Carnegie Hall debut one month later. His reputation grew throughout the 1970s and the 1980s, and with the "velvet revolution" of the late 1980s in Czechoslovakia Moravec gained total freedom of movement and is now a pianist of international renown, comparable without exaggeration or hype with such past masters as Cortot, Gieseking, and Lipatti, though not wholly recognized as such—*that* will only come postmortem.

The fact that Moravec is not exactly a household name may be due to the nature of his repertoire. It is gratifying to list in this regard what he *never* plays: such pianistic cannonaders as Liszt, Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff—staples of a competition contestant and general careerist. As his pro-

grams and recordings demonstrate, the heart of his repertory lies in Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Schumann, Franck, Dvořák, Janáček, Debussy, and Chopin. Utterly unthinkable would be a final encore such as Manuel de Falla's "Ritual Fire Dance," with which Artur Rubinstein used to wow the crowds with a blur of hands at the end of his concerts. I remember well such a finale, delivered at the Bushnell Memorial Auditorium, Hartford, Connecticut, c. 1945. At age ten, I was, of course, stunned.

Within Moravec's preferred repertory, there are even more special preferences; in Beethoven, for instance, such sonatas as the "Appassionata," "Pathétique," "Moonlight," "Les Adieux" gain preference over such works as the "Hammerklavier" or the "Diabelli" variations. Moravec's choices have nothing to do with technical limitations; it is important to emphasize that his massive technical resources are all the more evident because they are so severely subjugated to entirely musical ends—no pounding, no garish triple fortes, no clatter. The recitals at Middlebury and Carnegie Hall were rich demonstrations of his special mastery of space in music—getting the air between the notes—and the lightest insinuation of rubato at key points, where a millisecond delay or a slightly anticipated chord makes all the difference between a studied literal-

ism and a kind of easy, improvisational musical nonchalance.

I got the impression that the Middlebury audience was puzzled by Moravec's advocacy of the knotty two-movement Janáček sonata. In the splendid sonic setting of Carnegie Hall, the work had a more orchestral delivery. Audience reception was still wary, but a bit more enthusiastic on behalf of the novelty. As for the more traditional repertory, the pianist has been living with it for a long time, and, though there were no radical differences in approach between the two concerts and the canonic recordings, there were special nuances. For instance, at Middlebury, Moravec played as a final encore Chopin's seventeen-bar Prelude No. 7 in A major. It was a stately and exquisitely molded sendoff to an appreciative audience (standing ovation), but it was played without much rhythmic pulse. In Carnegie Hall, while playing all twenty-four of the *Preludes*, he delivered No. 7 much more quickly, with a Viennese lilt and lift, emphasizing its 3/4 time, providing perfect contrast to the next Prelude in F sharp minor, "molto agitato." He was playing the same notes, but they were utterly recast. And, too, I suspect that Moravec revelled in the more generous acoustics of Carnegie Hall for his Debussy selections, done with stunning atmosphere and panache.

—Alexander Coleman

The media

Their pretty little heads

by James Bowman

“Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus,” says the bestselling pop psychologist John Gray, and no one thinks twice about it. For the high-brow set, the bestselling pop linguist Deborah Tannen writes book after book to explain how men and women use language differently. At some level, presumably, we all still recognize the importance of the obvious and not-so-obvious differences between the sexes as much as the Victorians did. Indeed, you could argue that an idea like “the power of sisterhood” among women of all ages, races, religions, classes, and occupations, women united by anatomy alone, could only have occurred to an age fascinated almost to the point of obsession with the differences between the sexes. The Victorians were much readier to assume the irrelevance of sex to class or national or racial division, for example, and therefore were presumably closer than even the most “progressive” among us to the unisex ideal.

Three months out from September 11, sexual difference was becoming more and more of a feature of the media conversation. Paul Farhi in *The Washington Post* called our attention to what he calls “the worry gap” between men and women.

Four in 10 women told pollsters from the Pew Research Center in late October that they had experienced feelings of depression after Sept. 11; only one in five men reported the same thing. Women were more than twice as likely as men to experience insomnia as a result of

the news. And just over 50 percent of women told Pew researchers earlier this month that they’re “very” or “somewhat” concerned about a new attack. The proportion of men who felt this way: 30 percent. These results are consistent with a study published in mid-November in *The New England Journal of Medicine*; it found higher “stress reactions” among women than men immediately after the attacks.

Fear and anxiety are common in both sexes; evolutionary biologists say such responses are “adaptive mechanisms” necessary for survival and hence propagation. But faced with the free-floating stress of threats unseen and unknowable, men and women tend to take distinctly different paths.

Women, that is, are more depressed and anxious and eager to talk about their feelings, while men are stoical and taciturn, tending to bottle things up. Who’d have guessed? “Man: rational. Woman: emotional?,” asks Mr. Farhi. “A cheap stereotype, a gross generalization? It’s never that simple. We’re all sliding back and forth between those poles, driven by circumstance and temperament. But that doesn’t mean it isn’t generally true.”

The sexual dimension of tragedy was also Peggy Noonan’s theme when she announced in *The Wall Street Journal* that “men are back.”

A certain style of manliness is once again being

honored and celebrated in America since Sept. 11. You might say it suddenly emerged from the rubble of the past quarter century, and emerged when a certain kind of man came forth to get a great country out of the fix it was in. I am speaking of masculine men, men who push things and pull things and haul things and build things, men who charge up the stairs in a hundred pounds of gear and tell everyone else where to go to be safe.

Nor is it only right-wing women who grow all kittenish when those manly men ripple their muscles at them. Maureen Dowd, the doyenne of Chick Lit at *The New York Times*, agrees with Peggy—up to a point, anyway.

Women used to get in a snit when a hardhat with a flag decal wolf-whistled at them.

Now women get in a swoon when a hardhat with a flag decal wolf-whistles at them.

In three decades, feminism has done a back flip. Once men in uniform were the oppressors. Now they're trophy mates. Once cops were pigs. Now they're foxes. Once firemen were the guys you brought home if you couldn't snag a doctor. Now they're the most sizzling accessory.

Bad news for the Dockers generation. "The Hunk Factor" blared the headline in Monday's *USA Today*. "Manly men and their uniforms muscle onto the scene."

As usual, Miss Dowd is coyly non-committal about what makes *her* little heart go pit-a-pat, but she was back a week later, on the release of a remake of the old Rat Pack picture *Ocean's Eleven*, with a characteristically giggly comparison between the famed rodent ruck and the Bush administration:

Forget about Clooney and Pitt mimicking vintage testosterone in the new Rat Pack remake. We've got the real deal right here. Septuagenarian testosterone. The suave swagger of Rummy and Cheney, enhanced by cluster bombs and secure locations instead of martinis and broads.

Who needs the men of "Ocean's 11" when you've got the men of Sept. 11?

Donald Rumsfeld, she thinks, who was proclaimed "the media star of America's new war," is the new Sinatra, while Dick Cheney is Dean Martin because of his "aplomb and quiet assurance." And if Tom Ridge is Peter Lawford, John Ashcroft (cue the giggles) has "that wacky, too-on-the-edge quality of, yes, Shirley MacLaine." Of course it is pointless to complain about the silliness and vulgarity of this kind of thing, since silliness and vulgarity are the point of it. Girls like Maureen are vulgar on principle, chattering of testosterone to show that they have been liberated from the pre-feminist restraint that would have prevented their mothers or grandmothers from writing such stuff.

In another essay on the sexual politics of September 11, Miss Dowd's colleague Naomi Wax revealed that now "Real Men Can Cry," at least if the spectacle of Rudolph Giuliani and others breaking down or welling up on television is anything to go by. As the Tibetan Buddhist Chogyam Trungpa put it in his imperishable *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior*, "the ideal is that the warrior should be sad and tender, and because of that, the warrior can be very brave as well." Doubtless *Shambhala* is to be found on the mayor's nightstand. "How things have changed," Miss Wax remarked, since public weeping scuppered the presidential campaign of Edmund Muskie in 1972. Indeed, she might have added that emotion is not only permitted, it is expected of men in the public eye, as Albert Gore, Jr., a former vice-president, was constantly reminding us.

Thus in a section-front profile of Thomas Friedman by Howard Kurtz in *The Washington Post* "Style" section, the celebrity columnist tells us that "I've just been reacting to this story in a very gut way. . . . I'm writing out of a real sense of anger." Friedman can hardly expect that this news will give us greater confidence in the cogency of what he has to say, so what he must have in-

tended by telling us that—those of us, that is, who however few in number are interested—is that he thinks this “anger” will demonstrate his authenticity as a person. Or as a celebrity. For celebrities are always telling us their feelings. Sometimes, too, they tell us their thoughts whenever some mischievous interviewer thinks we need a good laugh. But mostly they tell us their feelings. And for the same reason. Because by avouching their common humanity they invite us to participate vicariously in their feelings and so confirm their own celebrity.

Still, best not greet the dawn of the new era too enthusiastically. As Glenn Hendler, author of *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture*, put it to Naomi Wax: “The meaning of a man’s display of emotions depends a great deal on how he has performed masculinely in the past. . . . If Giuliani hadn’t seemed so unsentimental, even inhumane, previously, would we have been so affected by his display of emotion?” Moreover, as men are liberated from old emotional constraints, women are put into them. “It’s doubtful, in other words, that leaders like Condoleezza Rice or Hillary Rodham Clinton would get much sympathy if they welled up.” In a woman, at least a woman with aspirations to political leadership, such weakness would be thought unbecoming. If manly men are back, womanly women are still rather an embarrassment.

Yet if all such discussion of the sexual markers attaching to emotional behavior presupposed fundamental male-female differences, any discussion of such differences as they might impinge on policy, military strategy, or international relations remained in bad taste, like mentioning rope in the house of the hanged man—or, indeed, hanged woman. Only occasional hints of a distinctively feminine—or feminist—approach to war were allowed. Sarah Wildman, for instance, wrote an excellent piece in *The New Republic* remarking on the curious fact that, although movement feminists had been in the forefront of calling attention to the plight of women under Taliban

rule in Afghanistan, they seemed to have fallen silent—or even to have gone into opposition—since the war began.

Brand-name feminists have retreated to clichés about women and nonviolence. “Women are not more moral than men, or even intrinsically different from men,” said feminist matriarch Gloria Steinem. “It’s just that we have been raised without our masculinity to prove. We . . . can come up with new and different solutions and end this cycle of violence and revenge.” *Sisterhood is Powerful* editor Robin Morgan urged women on the Internet to “[t]alk about the root causes of terrorism, about the need to diminish this daily climate of patriarchal violence surrounding us in its state-sanctioned normalcy.” Barbara Ehrenreich and Alice Walker weighed in with similarly worded missives. And the Third Wave Foundation, whose praiseworthy goal is to “inform and empower a generation of young women activists,” urged women to “unite in calls for a peaceful resolution to this attack.”

Interestingly, Osama bin Laden appears to have made somewhat the same point as Ms. Steinem’s only in a different way.

Our brothers who fought in Somalia saw wonders about the weakness, feebleness, and cowardliness of the US soldier. . . . We believe that we are men, Muslim men who must have the honour of defending [Mecca]. We do not want American women soldiers defending [it]. . . . The rulers in that region have been deprived of their manhood. And they think that the people are women. By God, Muslim women refuse to be defended by these American and Jewish prostitutes.

In his view too, men—at least American men—are “not . . . intrinsically different” from women and (good news, Gloria!) no longer have their masculinity to prove, since that quality has already been tested in Somalia and elsewhere and found wanting. It is possible that, since the war began, Osama has modified his view of American

masculinity, though it is highly doubtful that Ms. Steinem has.

Let us stipulate from the outset that she and a great many others of the sisterhood are quite right to call our attention to the absurdities of masculine vanity. From a woman's point of view nothing could be more ridiculous than that a man will submit himself to being shot at or blown up simply so that he won't appear a coward in the eyes of some other man—even when the other man may be someone he despises. Ah, well, men are from Mars. . . James Delingpole in *The Spectator* writes of the incomprehension of his female relatives when he can't tear himself away from "Band of Brothers" on television. He imagines that they suppose he is thinking "Ooh guns! Ooh tanks! Ooh blood! . . . Hey, cool!" When what he is really thinking is "Jesus! How would I have coped?"

Women will never understand what a burden it is to live with this absurd vanity about our courage, but that is why they are women. Lots of their little vanities are lost on us, too. Women are from Venus. But it does seem a bit much that, having recognized the remarkably stubborn fact of masculine absurdity, they should then go on to behave as if it didn't exist, as if merely calling attention to it were enough to make men slink shamefacedly away from their war movies and their wars, their cycles of violence and revenge, and turn their attention to the health, education, and the sartorial barbarity of Afghan women. A correspondent named Susan E. Reed of Swampscott, Massachusetts, wrote to *The New Republic* apropos of Sarah Wildman's article that the problem with it is that the author "assumes war is the solution when, for the women of Afghanistan, it has been the source of their long torture."

Well, yes. By all means let's stop it. But the fact that, in all human history, no war has ever been stopped without the defeat of one side or the other seems never to have entered Ms. Reed's calculations, nor those of other women who have been schooled to

suppose that all men are as susceptible to moral intimidation as those of the American establishment have been for the last thirty years and more. The unspoken assumption here, it seems to me, is that war is just boys playing their silly boy-games, and that they will simply stop if spoken to sharply enough. That women are not disabused of this notion—at least not when they are sufficiently distant from the actual scenes of conflict—is perhaps owing to the sense men have, deep down, that war, even war whose aims have come to include establishing the right of foreign women not to have to go around sheathed in silk from head to foot, is a silly boy-game and a hell of a thing to go and get yourself killed for.

Not that that sense is of the slightest use in providing any alternative to defeating the enemy or being defeated by him. Any number of sensible and upright schoolmarms telling us to stop behaving so childishly will never make the world otherwise than essentially childish. Yet it is as much in the nature of women, one must suppose, to go on nagging as if it would, as it is in that of men to go on fighting. The media, as it happens, with their emphasis on talk and the display of feelings, are better adapted to the nagging function than the fighting one—at least while the visuals are few. The media ethos is also congenial to the Venusian point of view in that both are founded on assertions of moral superiority. Whenever a journalist hears someone tell him that it is well not to "sink to the level" of those who achieve their ends by violence his (or her) bosom will always return an echo.

So accustomed to this pose of moral superiority have we become that we hardly notice it anymore. In a review in *The Washington Post* of a new movie about the ill-fated Shackleton expedition to the South Pole, Rita Kempley writes of Shackleton as "a bullheaded English explorer" and wonders whether his story is "one of perseverance or sheer stupidity." More silly boy-games! Some such assumption lies behind the hectoring of Katha Pollitt of *The Nation*, who notoriously announced in the after-

math of the tragedy that the American flag “stands for jingoism and vengeance and war.” Even the fact that men fighting under that flag helped to end the reign of the Taliban in Afghanistan has done nothing to mollify her since.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if the defeat of the Taliban also marked the end of the cultural-relativist pooh-poohing of women's rights? Only a few weeks ago, a Bush Administration spokesperson was refusing to promise that women would play a role in a new Afghan government: “We have to be careful not to look like we are imposing our values on them.” A week before it began, no women had been mentioned as participants in the UN-sponsored Bonn conference to plan for a postwar Afghanistan.

Then, after some typical animadversions on President Bush's “callous disregard for women's rights and health abroad”—her way of saying that he is morally opposed to abortion—she concludes: “That the Taliban are gone is cause for joy. A world that cared about women's rights would never have let them come to power in the first place.” This easy, contemptuous familiarity with the world, which to her is just “a world”—the indefinite article suggesting the sad failure of this particular world to live up to K. Pollitt's expectations (the shame! the shame!) of a world—and the assumption that if it were properly ordered it would be jumping, like a recalcitrant husband, to do her bidding is just one of those charming quirks of womankind that we have learned to put up with in our public discourse.

Perhaps the most hilariously misconceived and misguided feminist rant about the war came from the novelist Barbara Kingsolver, who wrote an op-ed for *The Washington Post* in which she purported to point out “where we have mislaid our sense of global honor” by citing Franklin Roosevelt's “Four Freedoms” speech as an example of the ab-

surd proposition that that president is to be distinguished from a certain unnamed successor of sixty years on because “instead of invoking fear of outsiders he embraced their needs as our own and called for defending, not just at home but on all the earth, what he called the four freedoms: freedom of speech and expression, freedom of religion, freedom from fear, freedom from want.”

This, mind you, of the man who just about a month later was to order thousands of Japanese-Americans into concentration camps (something that she blames on skull-duggery in the War Department). She goes on to claim that

He warned that it was immature and untrue “to brag that America, single-handed and with one hand tied behind its back, can hold off the whole world” and that any such “dictator's peace” could not be capable of international generosity or returning the world to any true independence. “Such a peace would bring no security for us or for our neighbors. Those who would give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.”

But the implicit and derogatory comparison to a certain American president whose name starts with B makes no sense. Roosevelt was warning against the counsels of the appeasers and isolationists who had been immensely influential in this country up until Pearl Harbor, just a month before this speech, and the “dictator's peace” he refers to would have been the separate peace with Germany that they proposed which, after a subsequent German victory, would have left America in the pleonastic state that he warned against. In other words, he was warning against the counsel of those who did not want to fight, though Ms. Kingsolver seems to be under the impression that he was on their side.

So here's yet another woman who shouldn't be bothering her pretty little head with politics—if only one had the testicular fortitude to say so.

Books

Isaac Babel's genre of silence

by Gary Saul Morson

The romance of revolution has repeatedly seduced European intellectuals and nowhere more intensely than in Russia. In the late nineteenth century, Russia became the first country in which young members of the intelligentsia, when asked their career choice, might answer "revolutionary" or "terrorist"—a choice regarded as highly honorable, albeit dangerous. Indeed, the word "intelligentsia" was originally a Russian coinage, meaning not a thinking or educated person, but one, however well or ill educated, committed wholeheartedly to socialism, atheism, and revolution. If we reflect that this group actually succeeded in taking over the state—Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin were all typical *intelligents*—then we recognize the importance of cultural battles. We also recognize the larger significance of Russian history and literature for understanding the modern world.

By and large, the classic Russian writers were opposed to the intelligentsia and its extremist ethos, so contrary to the careful particularities of great novels and realist stories. The history of Russian culture could more or less be narrated as the disputes between the intelligentsia and the great writers. In 1909, the eminent literary and social critic Mikhail Gershenzon wrote that "the surest gauge of the greatness of a Russian writer is the extent of his hatred for the intelligentsia"—a view that works well if we think of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Chekhov. But 1917 altered the picture considerably.

Revolutionary fervor swept up many of the writers, who found themselves intoxicated by an era of apocalyptic and romantic violence in the name of a high ideal.

One such writer, who was to learn the hard way the dangers of a revolutionary regime in power, was Isaac Babel (1894–1940). His deeply ambiguous feelings about revolution shape his central work, *Red Cavalry* (more literally *Cavalry*), a cycle of stories about the Russian revolutionary army's invasion of Poland in 1920 as the Bolsheviks attempted to spread Communism to the rest of the world. Under the non-Jewish name of Lyutov, the Jewish Babel served with this army, and the stories fictionalize—sometimes without even changing names—what happened to the invading soldiers, to the Polish and Jewish inhabitants they encountered, and to Lyutov (the name of the stories' principal narrator) himself.

The cycle, taken as a whole, remains one of the masterpieces of Russian literature. If one thinks of a great work as one that will be read by nonspecialists a hundred years hence, then I think there are only three works of post-Revolutionary Russian prose that are without qualification great: Mikhail Bulgakov's comic masterpiece about the devil's visit to Soviet Russia, *The Master and Margarita*; Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, which finds an appropriate strategy for making an endless chronicle of horrors into compelling reading; and Ba-

bel's *Red Cavalry*. Like Bulgakov and Solzhenitsyn, Babel also wrote a number of other significant works, most notably some charming and hilarious stories about the Jewish community in Odessa. *The Complete Works of Isaac Babel*¹ collects all of Babel's known extant works, including his diary of 1920—which was published in Russian only in 1990 and in Carol Avins's and Harry Willetts's fine English version in 1995. We have in *The Complete Works* at last the possibility of seeing Babel's mind at work in a diversity of forms, among them drama, some rather repellent revolutionary journalism, and the notes that form the basis for his masterpiece. *Red Cavalry* has puzzled by its studied ambiguities and its sonorous laconicism. Babel was famous for his devotion to the compressed phrase, often oxymoronic or otherwise startling in its choice of words, and for his dictum that "no iron can pierce the human heart . . . like a period well-placed."

In an essay that did a great deal for Babel's reputation in the United States, Lionel Trilling viewed *Red Cavalry* as a Freudian meditation on the timeless themes of a young man's initiation and of the opposition between civilized repression and natural impulses, as symbolized by the sensitive Jewish narrator's encounter with violent Cossack soldiers. The Jew longs to overcome his effeminate Jewishness, which he nevertheless treasures like "the rotting Talmuds of my childhood," and so, with a complexity of emotions captured in somewhat overwrought phrases, he admires violence and, up to a point, learns to commit it. Lyutov brutally slays a goose, so that his comrades will see him as one of the men; they then listen when he reads them propaganda, "rejoicing in the mysterious curve of Lenin's straight line"; and at last they all lie down to sleep in the hayloft.

Six of us slept there warming each other, our

¹ *The Complete Works of Isaac Babel*, edited by Nathalie Babel, translated by Peter Constantine; W. W. Norton, 992 pages, \$39.95.

legs tangled, under the holes in the roof which let in the stars. I dreamed and saw women in my dreams, and only my heart, crimson with murder, screeched and bled.

Here, and elsewhere, the narrator is drawn by the sheer sexuality of power, violence, and male comradeship. In another story, a peasant protests that a sickly mare he has been given in compensation for one requisitioned is actually unable even to stand up. The commander, however, briefly revivifies the horse by—believe it or not—sheer sexual power. The horse "licked some invisible command from his crimson palm, and immediately the feeble mare felt bracing power flow from the sprightly, gray, blossoming Romeo. . . . Her whole body shivering, the mare stood on all four legs without moving her timid, doglike, love-struck eyes from Dyakov." Or is it, we ask, the narrator, rather than the horse, who senses Dyakov's sexuality?

Trilling sees the other side of the dialectic—the only antithesis to the admiration of sexually charged violence he perceives—as mystical love, Catholic in some stories and Jewish in others. One character, an old Jew named Gedali, longs for an impossible International of good people, which would constitute a revolution of decency; another, an heretical Catholic artist, paints holy scenes with the lowlife of the town supplying the faces for Jesus, Mary, and the saints. Perhaps still more remarkable, although Trilling does not mention them, are the apocryphal stories. In one, we are told how Jesus begot a child. A woman, who from sheer desire and nervousness vomited on her wedding night, was mocked by her husband and all the guests, until Jesus,

filled with pity at seeing the anguish of the woman who was thirsting for her husband but also fearing him, donned the robes of the newlywed man and united himself with her as she lay in her vomit. Afterward she went out to the wedding guests, loudly exulting like a woman proud of her fall.

We are repeatedly given little folk stories like this to interpret. Jesus on the cross was plagued by gnats, and when a bee came by, the gnats demanded that the bee sting the savior, but the bee refused, because Jesus, too, was a carpenter. Trilling, who tells us that he first read Babel hoping to find an escape from modernist complexities in a Soviet writer, seems to miss the point of stories like this and, indeed, to overlook what, in the Russian context, appears to be the real alternative to the lure of killing: the occupations of everyday life, whether carpentry or the rhythms of the family. The bee story, for instance, is told after the soldiers senselessly destroy hives, and the narrator observes that “the chronicle of our everyday crimes oppresses me as relentlessly as a bad heart.” Daily revolutionary crimes destroy the basis of daily life. “Everyday life, which once has flourished, has blown away,” the narrator elsewhere observes.

Perhaps the wisest character in these stories is not the poetic Gedali or the heretical painter Pan Apolek, but Lyutov’s driver, the simple Grishchuk, who seems to emerge directly either from life or from Tolstoy.

“Grishchuk! . . . we’re done for!” I hollered, seized by the exhilaration of disaster. “We’re finished!”

“All the trouble our womenfolk go to!” he said even more morosely. “What’s the point of all the matchmaking, marrying, and in-laws dancing at weddings?”

A rosy tail lit up in the sky and expired. The Milky Way surfaced from under the stars.

“It makes me want to laugh!” Grishchuk said sadly, and pointed his whip at a man sitting at the side of the road. “It makes me want to laugh that women go to such trouble!”

The narrator still senses the exhilaration of disaster, illuminated by the rosy tail of a star, but Grishchuk sees the sheer waste of destroying what really matters, what wives and mothers value and what revolutions destroy.

The man by the side of the road, mortally wounded and with his entrails hanging out, begs Lyutov to kill him before the Poles find

and torture him. But Lyutov, though he can love Lenin’s prose and admire Cossack violence, cannot go through with it and leaves the job to his friend Afonka Bida, who then utterly despises him.

“Well, there you have it, Grishchuk,” I said to him. “Today I lost Afonka, my first real friend.”

Grishchuk took out a wrinkled apple from under the cart seat.

“Eat it,” he told me, “please eat it.”

These stories, like so much of Russian literature, question what seems to be the prime faith of intellectuals, that truth is to be found in extreme situations—the idea that everyday life is hopelessly banal, bourgeois, and deceitful, that reality is only authentic where things are starkest. All those intellectuals, from Shaw to Sartre to Céline to Foucault to Mayakovsky and countless others, who were attracted to one fanatic movement or another, seem, for all their differences, to share the assumption that everyday life—*byt* in Russian—is the great enemy: “love’s boat has smashed against *byt*,” as Mayakovsky memorably wrote. Tolstoy and Chekhov tell us differently; it is only in an everyday life well lived, they say, that meaning and truth are to be found. The question is not, as Trilling thought, whether to prefer a mystical heretic or a revolutionary killer; it is whether we value all that trouble that womenfolk take and all that men can do to aid what is utterly prosaic and really important.

Perhaps the most remarkable story Babel wrote is “The Life and Adventures of Matthew Rodionovich Pavlichenko.” It deals with an uneducated officer who nevertheless encapsulates the revolutionary mentality of every ideology. On the surface, Pavlichenko’s tale is a simple revenge story. He murders his cruel pre-revolutionary master, but the point is that this is not just murder, but something much more horrifying: an exploration of the human heart in an extreme situation—indeed, an experiment in making

a situation as extreme as possible in order to explore the human heart at its most authentic. Pavlichenko refuses simply to shoot his enemy; he would not learn anything that way.

Then I started kicking Nikitinsky, my master, I kicked for an hour, maybe even more than an hour, and I really understood what life actually is. With one shot, let me tell you, you can only get rid of a person. A shot would have been a pardon for him and too horribly easy for me, with a shot you cannot get to a man's soul, to where the soul hides and what it looks like. But there are times when I don't spare myself and spend a good hour, maybe even more than a hour, kicking the enemy. I want to understand life, to see what it actually is.

Anyone could have thought of the idea that slow torture is a greater punishment than quick execution, but the point of this story—its sudden surprise—is that Pavlichenko will not spare *himself*. It is his disinterested devotion to science, to the knowledge of life's essence, that makes him do whatever it takes to make the soul reveal itself.

The soul, it seems, is most itself when tortured. But is that really so? Perhaps, on the contrary, the essence of life is *least* apparent when most distant from ordinary experience? That extreme situations mislead was, I think, Babel's point and Lyutov's ultimate lesson, a counter-idea deeply consonant with the rhythms of Russian literature. I often think of Pavlichenko when I hear those who would soften the horrors of Leninism refer to "the Soviet experiment," as if Lenin were a disinterested social scientist conducting a noble, if difficult, bit of research. When one thinks of Babel's story, one realizes that, if so, the millions killed in the name of "science" would make the Russian Revolution morally even worse.

The translation of this passage is accurate, but its tone misses something: in the original, Pavlichenko appears, in a confidential, almost musing manner, to be searching for words, trying to explain just what he hopes

to accomplish by his peculiar quest for truth. One has to be sympathetic to anyone who tries to render such a master of sentence rhythms as Babel, and generally this version by Peter Constantine does an adequate job. There are perhaps fewer lapses than in the Walter Morison version, which Trilling read. Yet there are moments when one prefers Morison. The opening story, "Crossing the River Zbrucz" (Morison condescends to the reader's ignorance of boundaries by making the title "Crossing into Poland"), describes the narrator billeted with a Jewish family, whom he treats rather roughly. They play a horrible joke on him. The woman of the house has him sleep next to her father, but later wakens him to reveal that he is, in fact, sleeping next to a corpse.

"Pan [Polish for 'sir']," the Jewess says, shaking out the eiderdown, "the Poles were hacking him to death and he kept begging them, 'Kill me in the backyard so my daughter won't see me die!' But they wouldn't inconvenience themselves. He died in this room, thinking of me. . . . And now I want you to tell me," the woman said suddenly and with terrible force, "I want you to tell me where one could hope to find another father like my father in all the world!" [end of story]

I think it should be plain that the emphasis on this sentence, and therefore its final words, should be placed not on "world" but on "father." Morison (and the Russian original) give: "where in the whole world you could find another father like my father?" Now the punctuation can pierce the human heart.

This collection has been lovingly edited by Nathalie Babel, the author's daughter, who includes a moving account of her own life as Babel's daughter and as a Jew and a Soviet citizen in Nazi-occupied France. She lets us feel her mixture of emotions as she gradually discovers, and holds herself back from discovering, the facts—many disturbing—of Babel's life, loves, and death. For a decade and a half, Babel was unmentionable

in Soviet Russia, and only when the archives were opened in the 1990s was it established that Babel had been shot in 1940. His last words were a protestation of his innocence and a plea to continue his work. That work has never surfaced.

In a remarkable appearance at the Congress of Writers in 1934, Babel gave a wry speech in which, with multiple layers of irony, he praised the Soviet regime for having deprived writers of the right to write badly; commenting on his lack of publications in recent years, he also claimed to have mastered "the genre of silence." It was as if his own laconism had merely been taken a step further. And yet, even in the writings we do have, the hint often speaks loudest. We hear, in the resonant tonalities of the barely but piercingly audible, the appreciation, in extraordinary times, of all that is careful, precise, and ordinary.

A lost lady

Carolyn G. Heilbrun *When Men Were the Only Models We Had: My Teachers Barzun, Fadiman, Trilling.* University of Pennsylvania Press, 159 pages, \$24.95

reviewed by Jeffrey Hart

This is an extraordinary book, I am relieved to say. If Mr. Kurtz had kicked free of the earth, as Conrad wrote, the Columbia English professor Carolyn Heilbrun has kicked free at least from common sense and immensely shared human experience. The "woman's movement," she tells us, struck her as an overwhelming and liberating development. She appears here to be interested in absolutely nothing except the situation of women as she sees it. I called this book extraordinary, not intending that as a celebration. If the emotions and ideas that inform it came to prevail generally, life would not be worth living.

When you know that she has written a book on androgyny, you understand that

we are in serious trouble. In 1997 she published *The Last Gift of Time: Life Beyond Sixty*. She reflected on turning sixty, not wearing clothes that are distinctively female, and gaining a lot of weight as if deliberately to destroy whatever attractiveness she might have had. The age sixty moment causes her to consider committing suicide, though these days sixty is hardly the end of the line. You would think she had just turned ninety instead of sixty. It is entirely plausible, on the evidence of this book, that for Heilbrun life itself has lost its savor. Her emotions have been so wrenched out of shape by feminist dogma that she cannot present to the readers of her books a recognizable shared world.

Heilbrun has been married and is a mother, but she is awfully sour on marriage. In *When Men Were the Only Models We Had*, she observes that

Unrealistic fantasy explains why so many novels in the past ended with wedding bells. The marriage did not have to be endured by readers, only by the participants, and then it was not to be overseen. Hope was all that mattered, that and the experience, *at least in novels* [italics added], of "being in love."

That first sentence says that a happy marriage is an "unrealistic fantasy." This amounts to moral and intellectual treason against an enormous amount of actual human experience. Her use of the synecdoche "wedding bells" has a sneering quality. The next sentence says that marriage is something to be "endured." Sometimes, maybe. But you can move out. She knows that the woman is the victim in marriage. The third sentence says that "being in love" is an experience that happens "in novels," whereas in the actual world it is one of the most overwhelming of human experiences. She sneeringly encloses the phrase "being in love" within quotation marks, as if it were a fiction or an illusion. I suppose for her androgyny is a superior condition. Planet Earth calling Carolyn Heilbrun: Romeo and Juliet are angry. (You would also gather

from these sentences that novels do not, or seldom at least, depict unfortunate marriages. If that is what is implied, the notion is preposterous. Start with *Middlemarch*.)

Evident in this book are the destructive forces that have divided the once-powerful Columbia English Department into bitter and dysfunctional factions. She herself acknowledges the bitterness within the department. In fact, Columbia has had to bring in Professor Jonathan Arac from the University of Pittsburgh to serve as chairman and try to patch things back together. The hope is that Arac can talk with people who refuse to talk with each other. I gather that this is a first in the history of the American university. But the feuding Columbia professors have been unable to agree on appointments, promotions, requirements, and so forth because of ideological furies. Professor Edward Said, himself a fanatic in his own right, has been driven to ask his colleagues to calm down and start teaching literature again. Fat chance.

For decades, the freshman Humanities I–II course has been the jewel of Columbia’s undergraduate liberal arts education. Students and alumni have almost unanimously testified to its value. I myself taught it for six years (1956–62). It begins with the *Iliad* in the Fall of Freshman year and travels through established classics and selections from the Old and New Testaments, ending with an important novel—when I taught it, *Crime and Punishment*. The faculty teaching the course met for lunch once a week at the Faculty Club on Morningside Drive to exchange ideas. These were often brilliant occasions.

Sourpuss will have none of that. She writes:

When I, however, joined the Columbia faculty, as a woman I was not allowed to teach the so-called honors courses in the college, though I longed to. I cannot resist noting here that decades later, it afforded me much amusement when the young women now teaching the honors courses, Contemporary

Civilization and Humanities (CC and LIT-HUM, as they were dubbed), hated almost every minute of it, evidence of the sharp change in the department since the days when those honors courses had been revered.

The expression “sharp change” is a risible understatement. The Humanities I–II course was justly revered, I might add. I am skeptical about Heilbrun’s statement that she was not assigned a section of that course because she is a woman. Professor Marjorie Hope Nicolson, a major eminence, was chairman of the graduate English Department.

There are many reasons for not assigning a particular individual to Humanities I–II. Reading this book, I am certain Heilbrun’s classroom discussion would have been a destructive travesty. The sentences I have just quoted drip with resentment and venom. “So-called” honors courses? In fact they *were* called honors courses, part of a core curriculum. And how about those “young women” who “hated almost every minute” of teaching Homer, Plato, Exodus, Job, Sophocles, Thucydides, Dante, Shakespeare, Voltaire, Molière, Goethe, Dostoyevsky? Who were these “young women”? Clearly, they were unsuited to be professors of literature, since they “hated” teaching some of the best things ever written. They surely belonged in the Department of Abnormal Psychology, not as teachers, to be sure, but as objects for scientific study.

What pathology blinded them to the best that has been thought and said and split the Columbia English Department? Pretty clearly, they were radical feminists who were bored by great literature, “hated” it even, and instead wanted to teach their gripes. Harold Bloom has called this faction the “party of resentment.” To permit one of these vipers into an academic department of literature was an act of tragic folly.

Heilbrun has here a nasty little chapter entitled “From WASPS and Dryden to Jews and Freud.” I note her treatment of Mark Van Doren, one of the great classroom teachers in the history of Columbia College.

I took his course called "The Narrative Art," one of the most profound and thoughtful courses offered: Homer, the Bible, Dante, Cervantes, Kafka. His books *The Noble Voice* (on epics) and *Shakespeare* are still powerful, vital critical efforts. His first major work, *John Dryden*, remains the best book on Dryden, and was reviewed with great admiration in the *Times Literary Supplement* by none other than T. S. Eliot. Not bad for a Ph.D. dissertation.

Heilbrun seems to think that Mark Van Doren became a star at Columbia because he had the right WASP background and connections. This is reductive nonsense. Probably he did have such connections. His brother Carl was in the History Department. But his M.A. thesis on Thoreau had been published and without a doubt he deserved his appointment and his eminence because of merit.

Heilbrun seems to have an irresistible desire to turn herself into an intellectual disaster area. She writes: "I . . . sat in on Van Doren's Shakespeare's lectures and can remember nothing at all except a general ambiance of pleasantness." This is but one of her many epiphanies of disgraceful self-revelation. Van Doren's lectures on Shakespeare were luminous. Hers was a mind losing active cerebral cells.

The arch-villain of this book, absurdly enough, is Lionel Trilling. (He was already the model for a murderer in her 1970 mystery novel *Poetic Justice*, written under the pen name Amanda Cross.) Two other figures, Clifton Fadiman and Jacques Barzun, make cameo appearances. She never met Fadiman, but admired his relaxed prose style, and he is marginally in this book because Heilbrun thinks he undervalued writers who were women. I judge that Fadiman is here as stuffing, to make a book out of her attack on Lionel Trilling. She has nothing but praise for Jacques Barzun, and he did, according to her, respect the possibility of achievement for women. But his impeccable politeness was to her a distancing wall. Life sometimes is really hard. Her multitude

of gripes and whines soon becomes Marie Antoinettish.

Her main gripe here, among a cavalcade of somewhat lesser gripes, is that Trilling and Barzun were not familiar enough with her, either as a graduate student or as a colleague. "They knew each other well; me they scarcely knew at all." She did not seek intimacy in a sexual sense. She wanted informality, exchanges of ideas, appreciation, and she met with formal manners, she thinks, of course, because she is a woman. She was excluded from their "club" as she puts it.

Now I had a somewhat parallel career to Heilbrun's at Columbia. I took the famous Barzun-Trilling seminar, as she did, while a graduate student and a member of the English Department. I knew Barzun and Trilling, but they were thirty years older than I, had gone to Columbia together as young men, and had been friends for decades. Social intimacy such as Heilbrun desired was out of the question. Exchanging jokes, let alone personal revelations, was not something desired. These older men, formal but also relaxed, were friendly and interested. Still, such comradeship as she wanted would have falsified our relative positions. Unlike the needy Heilbrun, I experienced their formality as a form of honesty.

Trilling did not mix with the younger professors over cocktails, though he did have me and others to the Trilling apartment for drinks and talk, sometimes dinner. He engaged me to give his son Jim tennis lessons. I had Lionel and Diana to dinner at the West Side Tennis Club. I remember that on one occasion at the Trillings' apartment I spotted a large cockroach running around and said "Gregor." Lionel said "No one throw an apple," but Diana was furious, saying we should not joke about the great Kafka. But despite such fun he was still Lionel Trilling, and I was still only trying for importance and achievement.

Barzun and Trilling, professionally speaking, were immensely powerful. I had little power. It would have been absurd for them

to treat me as if I were thirty years older than I was, as if my meager achievement were somehow comparable to theirs. Formality is a good way to recognize the disparities of power. It is more authentic than some sort of false "intimacy." You don't slap the President of the United States on the back.

About Trilling's literary criticism Heilbrun is now to a considerable degree dismissive. In the real world, Trilling at his best ranks among the great literary critics who have written English. Heilbrun does not admire his somewhat mandarin prose style, a mixture of the Oxford style of Newman and Arnold plus something of the distinction-making delicacy of Henry James. She prefers Fadiman. But at its best Trilling's prose is an inspired instrument.

She thinks, with some reason, that he considers men more important than women in a power sense. Surely that was a product of his time and place. I myself think his *Liberal Imagination* is a mixture of great essays and potboilers to fill out a book. It is remarkable that he can write about Dreiser without acknowledging the greatness of *Sister Carrie* and *An American Tragedy*. And his defence of Mark Twain's ending to *Huckleberry Finn* strikes me as silly. As Heilbrun says, graduate students today do not pay much attention to him, but that is their loss. Does any civilized person care much about Paul de Man or Jacques Derrida? Flies of a summer.

Heilbrun records that when she was a graduate student Trilling advised her to drop her monocular feminist obsession. That was excellent advice. In this book we witness the melancholy sight of a mind in ideologically induced disintegration. Her mental lens is befogged. She has lost the ability to see the object as in itself it actually is, certainly the preliminary to reasonable discourse. She is a tragedy that has happened, unless, in a tough-minded way, you may regard her as a comedy without laughter. She is besotted by feminism. Trilling also supported her for tenure at Columbia. He must have been tired or intimi-

dated. To use a term he liked and she would hate, it would have been "manly" to send her packing.

All that glisters

Alan Stewart

Philip Sidney: A Double Life.

St. Martin's Press, 400 pages, \$26.95

reviewed by Paul Dean

The one thing most people know about the life of Sir Philip Sidney (1554–1586) was almost certainly invented by the man who first told the story, Sidney's lifelong friend and biographer Fulke Greville. Wounded in the Battle of Zutphen, and "being thirsty with excess of bleeding," Sidney called for a drink:

But as he was putting the bottle to his mouth he saw a poor soldier carried along, who had eaten his last at the same feast, ghastly casting up his eyes at the bottle; which Sir Philip perceiving, took it from his head before he drank, and delivered it to the poor man with these words: "Thy necessity is yet greater than mine."

Greville refurbished a story Plutarch told about Alexander the Great. The Sidney myth began early, as Alan Stewart reminds us at the outset of this new biography. For centuries Sidney was an exemplar of the Renaissance polymath and prodigy, the finest flower of Elizabethan chivalry. As so often, it was left to T. S. Eliot, in "A Cooking Egg," to supply the irony:

I shall not want Honour in Heaven,
For I shall meet Sir Philip Sidney
And have talk with Coriolanus
And other heroes of that kidney.

Eliot is typically obliquely subversive. Neither Coriolanus nor Sidney were straightforward "heroes." Sidney's bravery failed to prevent the Spanish from taking Zutphen.

This may, paradoxically, account for his fame: the English admire a hero, but they adore a heroic failure.

It has been ten years since the last major biography of Sidney, Katherine Duncan-Jones's *Sir Philip Sidney, Courtier Poet* (1991). The different emphases of the books are indicated by their titles. Stewart is deeply interested in Sidney's diplomatic and political career, which he sets in its English and European context with a wealth—indeed, an excess—of circumstantial detail. He does not add much to Duncan-Jones in this area, beyond a few newly discovered documents. His priorities are indicated by the quiet satisfaction with which he informs us that we can now establish the exact route taken by Sidney to Heidelberg in 1572. Duncan-Jones devoted much space to Sidney's principal literary works, the *Apology for Poetry*, the sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella*, and the prose romance *Arcadia*, all written between 1580 and 1584. She used them, frequently and effectively, to illuminate Sidney's life, as well as discussing them in their own right. Stewart, by contrast, offers four glancing allusions to the *Apology*, just over three pages on *Astrophil*, and about twelve on *Arcadia*. Yet if Sidney is a notable figure today, it is above all because of his works, not his life.

That life had an auspicious start. Both his parents were prominent in the Queen's service. Well-educated themselves, they employed the best private tutors before sending him, aged ten, to school at Shrewsbury, a town under his father's jurisdiction as Lord President of the Marches (the Welsh borders) and a Protestant stronghold in a still predominantly Catholic region. Protestantism was his inheritance: his mother had been sister-in-law to Lady Jane Grey, who for nine brief days, until her execution, was Queen of England after the death of Edward VI. The family had gone into eclipse during the reign of Queen Mary. Like his uncle, the Earl of Leicester, Philip Sidney was destined to be a champion of the Protestant cause. That was partly their un-

doing, since they served a queen who detested religious extremism and was quite prepared to sacrifice theological conviction to political expediency if need arose.

After Shrewsbury, Sidney, aged fourteen, attended another Protestant institution, Christ Church, Oxford. Few traces of his time there survive. Leaving without a degree, he embarked on a three-year peregrination, partly as a diplomat, partly as a student, which took him, first to Paris—where he witnessed the massacre of Huguenot Protestants in 1572—and then to Germany, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Italy, and Czechoslovakia. Everywhere he made contact with leading Protestants, many of whom still hoped for a pan-European alliance, if only Elizabeth would make the right marriage. His most important personal acquaintance was the Dutch humanist Hubert Languet, who effectively completed Sidney's education and with whom he exchanged a celebrated Latin correspondence. Languet was chief among a number of older men who acted as mentors to Sidney; he would alternately idolize and grow weary of them, for this *preux chevalier* was famously moody and bad-tempered, threatening to "thrust [his] dagger" into a servant he suspected of reading his private correspondence and challenging the Earl of Oxford to a duel when the earl called him a "puppy" in a public quarrel.

In 1577, after a period of aimless attendance at court, Sidney was sent to Germany on a mission of condolence following the deaths, in quick succession, of two leading Protestants, the Holy Roman Emperor and the Elector Palatine. He had the heavy responsibility of assessing the position, and trying to consolidate the future, of the Protestant cause at a time of sudden fragility. His impressive intellect and personal qualities won his hosts over; the queen was satisfied and began drafting a treaty with the Protestant powers in Germany. Yet she had also heard whispers of discontent about the sudden advancement of the Sidney family and insinuations that they might combine with foreign rulers against her. Sir Henry

Sidney was recalled from Ireland, where he had been the queen's deputy. His son played no further part in the negotiations for the treaty, which was abandoned.

In 1579, Sidney made a major blunder. In a characteristic about-turn, Elizabeth was negotiating a marriage with the Catholic Duke of Anjou, whom she invited to England. This enraged the Sidney circle. Two events then occurred, the order of which is unclear: Sidney's row with Oxford, who, as a Catholic, supported the Anjou marriage, and his addressing an open letter to Elizabeth arguing against it. He was not the only courtier to do so, and the letter was tactfully worded, urging the queen not to obscure the glories of a reign which had stemmed from her governing alone. Languet feared that his protégé had overstepped the mark. Although no immediate reprisals occurred, and Elizabeth, having publicly agreed to marry Anjou, promptly reneged on the promise, the Oxford affair was more serious. The Privy Council forbade the duel; Elizabeth summoned Sidney. In her most stinging manner, she reminded him, according to Greville, of "the difference in degree between earls, and gentlemen," and of "the respect inferiors ought [owed] to their superiors." Amazingly, he answered back, retorting that, although Oxford was "a great lord by birth, alliance, and grace; yet he was no lord over him." Elizabeth cannot have found this haughtiness to her liking.

The rest of Sidney's political career is quickly told. Frustrated by his lack of promotion, he foolishly attempted to embark with Drake for the New World in 1585 without having sought the Queen's consent, using his position as Master of the Royal Ordnance to supply Drake secretly with weapons and ammunition, and bypassing his formidable father-in-law, Secretary of State Francis Walsingham. Drake, however, took fright at the risk of displeasing the queen, and tipped her off about Sidney's intentions. She commanded his return, giving him as a sop the governorship of the Netherlands town of Flushing, a position

that he had earlier sought in vain. It was in this capacity that he participated in the fatal battle at Zutphen. He died one month short of his thirty-second birthday.

Sidney was at no time a major player in Elizabethan politics. He was at best a useful tool, an over-earnest prig whose inflexible principles were convenient for exploitation by others with less tender consciences. His dream of a hardline Protestant ascendancy was unrealized, both at home (where Elizabeth was too artful to favor one party) and abroad (where the balance of power was constantly shifting). His successes are not political and practical, but literary and theoretical. Although his sonnets are outclassed by Shakespeare's, the *Apology for Poetry* unites prodigious learning to a style at once sinewy and supple, airy and weighty. Its strictures on popular drama are too often quoted against him; had he lived to see Shakespeare, he might have changed his mind. The sustained comparison of philosophy and history, and the conclusion that poetry unites the virtues of both with the vices of neither, is a masterpiece of rhetoric. As for *Arcadia*, Eliot was not wholly fair in calling it "a monument of dullness." It has to be skimmed, and the original version is far more readable than the revision; still, it is a remarkable fusion of political philosophy, picaresque adventure, chivalric romance, and tragicomedy, a brilliant worked example of the theory of the *Apology*. If we want to appreciate Sidney's total achievement, Alan Stewart's book will not do. To borrow Sidney's distinction between the philosopher and the poet, his world is brazen, Katherine Duncan-Jones's is golden.

The age of bad ideas

Theodore Dalrymple Life at the Bottom.
Ivan R. Dee, 272 pages, \$27.50

reviewed by John Derbyshire

There is an odd conservatism in the common perceptions of life in other lands. I

grew up among English people who still thought of France—a rather stuffy and puritanical country in the 1960s—in terms of the “Gay Parce” of seventy years earlier, a place of unbridled license and monocled *boulevardiers* swilling champagne at the Follies Bergère. In the same way, many Americans carry in their minds an image of England as a polite and civilized land, where impeccably courteous David Niven types sit around at their clubs in antique leather armchairs sipping port, while, at the other end of society, stoic cockneys converse in rhyming slang and cheer each other up with cups of tea in the parlor. In fact today’s England is a rather coarse and violent place, whose crime statistics now surpass the United States’ in most categories (homicide being the principal exception). The nation’s everyday culture is dominated by the most brutish of proletarian values: politicians like Tony Blair from perfectly sound bourgeois families affect the dropped aitches and glottal stops of the slums, while the old codes of chivalry, patriotism, and restraint have been shoved aside in a snarling, clawing assertion of “rights.” American jaws drop when I say, in response to inquiries, how much I enjoy the comparative tranquillity, security, and civility of life in the United States and the exquisite manners of Americans—especially in the South, the best-mannered large region in the English-speaking world.

The older, tranquil England of the American imagination actually existed not long ago. I am merely middle-aged, but I can recall quiet working-class streets in the midland city of Birmingham, where I spent part of my childhood; they are now bedlams of vice and crime. Birmingham is, as it happens, the city where Theodore Dalrymple works as a hospital doctor, with occasional medical duties at a nearby prison. For some years he has been chronicling English underclass life: in regular columns in the London weekly *The Spectator* since at least 1993 (the limit of my own personal stock of *Spectator* back numbers), as a contributing editor for the Manhattan Insti-

tute’s quarterly *City Journal*, and with occasional pieces in other newspapers and periodicals, including this one. The main thrust of Dalrymple’s observations has always been the moral and intellectual poverty of the people he encounters while carrying out his professional rounds. He has observed these phenomena across many years and thousands of instances, and thought deeply about how they originated and what sustains them. In *Life at the Bottom* Dalrymple has put together twenty-two of his *City Journal* articles, written in the late Nineties and early Oughts.

Dalrymple writes with great clarity, slicing through the common gibberish of the “official” social sciences with the sword of reductionism. The child-rearing philosophy of the underclass is, he tells us, one of “laissez-faire tempered by insensate rage.” The distress that leads to attempted suicide—an everyday occurrence in the lives of Dalrymple’s patients—is “the consequence of not knowing how to live.” (A key insight. In another place he speaks of “the chronic suffering caused by not knowing how to live.”) The poor, he writes, “live in a torment of public and private disorder, which I have trembled to behold every day of the last ten years of my professional life.” Reading, we tremble with him. The misfortunes of a patient result from “a willful chasing after misery.” Root causes? “Since the cause of crime is the decision of criminals to commit it, what goes on in their minds is not irrelevant.”

Well, what does go on in underclass minds? Not much that is coherent, of course, since the people we are dealing with here have, either by their own will or under the example or intimidation of their peer group, rejected all attempts to educate them. The typical Dalrymple subject is “devoid of either ambition or interests,” his inner life a solipsistic jumble of “emotions . . . simultaneously intense and shallow.” It is clear, however, that all the cant of our age, all the doctrines of moral and cultural relativism that seized hold of the educated classes in the years after World War II, all

those pop-Marxist doctrines that attribute every worldly ill to some form of material deprivation, or to oppression by malign political conspiracies, have seeped down into the dull minds at the bottom of society, turning toxic in the process. Are our personalities formed in response to our physical environment? Why, then, the inanimate world is our master, and we cannot fairly be held responsible for the things we do. "The knife went in," three different stabbers told Dalrymple, when he pressed them, in the prison, to describe the deed that landed them there. Why should a low-IQ barely literate youth believe in the doctrine of free will, when, for all he can see, his intellectual superiors have given up on it?

Dalrymple is particularly good on the squeaky-wheel syndrome that is so characteristic of modern social services. Defy your circumstances; manage to get some scraps of education; win some decent, if low-level employment; stay out of trouble; stay off the dole; maintain some minimal standards of honesty and chastity; and see what happens to you! If you are lucky, the authorities will ignore you; if not, they will actually harass you. Should your less disciplined neighbors make your life a misery, you will get no help from police or social workers. But if you follow your peers into the world of dysfunction and dependency, all the attentions of England's extravagant welfare state will be lavished on you. You will be given a free apartment furnished with all modern appliances, a regular supply of money, free medical attention, and the dotting ministrations of "health visitors," "case workers," "counsellors," and so on.

Americans may find it surprising that most of the people wallowing in this slough of ignorance, illiteracy, promiscuity, bastardy, intoxication, vice, folly, lawlessness, and hopelessness are white English people. Much of what is described here is the sort of thing Americans instinctively associate with this country's own black underclass. There is some satisfaction, I suppose, though of a very melancholy kind, to be drawn from the revelation that sufficiently

wrong-headed social policies, persisted in with sufficiently dogged refusal to face simple truths, will visit moral catastrophe on people of any race.

Not that racial foolishness is altogether absent from *Life at the Bottom*. Thanks to government policies of staggering idiocy pursued across several decades, England is now both multiracial and multicultural, though there is no trace of evidence that any detectable number of English people ever wanted it to be either. This has, of course, made the country a much worse place to live in. Social workers, teachers, the police, and all other authority figures are thoroughly race-whipped, and know that any action they take against a person of color will bring them under the intense scrutiny of their superiors, not to mention the press and numerous busybody groups charged with maintaining the integrity of the "gorgeous mosaic."

Dalrymple illustrates this with the horrifying story of eight-year-old Anna Climbie, tortured to death by her mother, a West African who had come to England for the welfare benefits. The poor child had been admitted to hospital twice in the months before she died, and it was obvious to the doctors and nurses that she was a victim of gross abuse. They could not, however, persuade the police or welfare services to act. The child's condition and the abject terror she exhibited at her mother's approach were, the authorities believed—or pretended to believe, to keep themselves out of trouble—merely facets of West African culture, on which it would be wrong to pass judgment. Bad ideas again. Since people in other lands live contentedly under social norms wildly different from those of the London suburbs, why then, surely it's clear that one set of norms is just as good as another, and it would be wrong of us to find fault? We are living in the Age of Bad Ideas.

I think, though Dalrymple makes less of this, that the hedonism of the postwar middle classes has also been a large factor in

the collapse of morality over at the left-hand tail of the bell curve. It is a bad thing, but not an irremediable one, if the daughter of an architect has an illegitimate baby or acquires a minor drug habit. If the daughter of a janitor does these things, she has taken a headlong leap over the precipice into a lifetime of destitution. If any of the people who make social policy in England are aware of this simple fact, they probably regard it as another form of unfairness, to be resolved by lavishing money and attention on the janitor's daughter. A better remedy would be for the middle classes to behave themselves, and to give a good example to those beneath them, and to stop feeling so all-fired guilty about everything under the sun. That, of course, would be "elitist": but if there is a lesson to be drawn from *Life at the Bottom*, it is that a society's choice is never between having an elite and not having one, it is always between having an elite with a sense of responsibility and a will to provide leadership, and having an elite with neither.

At home abroad

Karel Čapek Letters from England, translated by Geoffrey Newsome. Claridge Press, 183 pages, £12.99

reviewed by Roger Kimball

The Czech novelist and playwright Karel Čapek was thirty-four when he finally decided to accept a year-old offer from P.E.N. to visit Britain in 1924. He was already well established as a writer. He had collaborated with his older brother, the painter and set designer Josef Čapek, on *The Insect Play* (1921), a political satire about totalitarianism; his novel *The Manufacture of the Absolute* (1923) had been published to wide acclaim; and such energetic and successful plays as *R.U.R.* (1920)—which introduced the word "robot" (*robota*: Josef's coinage) into the language—and *The Makropulos Affair* (1923) were garnering international at-

tention. But if Čapek was well-established, the Independent Czechoslovak Republic was a fledgling enterprise. Forged by the ceaseless efforts of the philosopher-politician T. G. Masaryk (1850–1937), it was a mere half-dozen years old. Hope had lately installed itself in the small, eager, inward-looking country. The Great War was past; Hitler did not yet loom; peace, progress, and prosperity bloomed everywhere. We know now how tragically short-lived it was to be. Čapek, always in delicate health, died in 1938 just after Chamberlain betrayed Czechoslovakia to Hitler; his brother, incarcerated in Dachau in 1939, perished at Bergen-Belsen in 1945.

In 1924, such disaster was, or seemed, impossibly distant. Čapek arrived in Folkestone at the end of May. He was met by Czech friends and instantly bundled into a train for London. His English was far from perfect, but his cultural antennae bristled with a voracious sensitivity. He registered the beauty, absurdity, power, mobility, and sheer vast variousness of what was then the greatest metropolis of the world's most extensive empire. He had come partly as an emissary to the British Empire Exhibition for the Czech newspaper *Lidové noviny*, partly as an independent cultural explorer. Over the course of two months he scoured Britain for impressions. Besides London, the self-described "pilgrim" visited Oxford, Cambridge, the Lake District, Edinburgh, Dartmoor, and various port cities. He cast a brief glance toward Ireland without actually going there. The result of his pilgrimage was a satchel of nearly thirty literary vignettes and some seventy amusing pen-and-ink drawings and caricatures. The chronicle began to be serialized in *Lidové noviny* while Čapek was still in Britain and in an English translation in *The Manchester Guardian* later that summer.

When it was first published in book form, in 1925, *Letters from England* elicited ecstatic reviews. *Punch* declared it "the best book about our race since the *Germania* of Tacitus." In his foreword to this handsome, newly translated edition of Čapek's work,

the philosopher Roger Scruton pitches it nearly as strong: the *Letters from England*, he writes, are “not merely a masterpiece of Czech prose; they are one of the seminal documents of Central European Culture, and among the most influential books of the twentieth century.”

Well, let us bracket Tacitus and the competition for influence and agree that *Letters from England* is what nearly every reviewer said it was: a “charming” and “humane” work of travel literature by a man of wry, candid, and cosmopolitan sensibility. Čapek brings just the right mixture of admiration and affectionate deprecation to bear on his subject; he gives his curiosity free rein, but tempers both praise and deflation with humor; he is as alive to human accomplishment as he is to human folly, and it is rare that he discovers one unmodified by the other.

Čapek is a master of gentle amazement. How extraordinary that things should so closely resemble their publicity! He captures a feeling that will be familiar to anyone who has traveled abroad:

It takes you aback to find that in Holland there really are windmills and canals or that on the Strand in London there really are so many people that it makes you feel unwell. There are two absolutely fantastic impressions: to discover something unexpected and to discover something very familiar. . . . I was . . . amazed when I found the Houses of Parliament on the river Thames, gentlemen in grey top hats in the streets, two-metre-tall Bobbies at the crossroads, and so on. It was a surprise to discover that England really is English.

The wonder extends to language. “Once I had set foot on land,” Čapek confesses, “I found to my surprise that I didn’t speak or understand a single word of English.” Many travelers, I believe, are secretly chagrined when they visit a foreign country and discover that a language they do not know is, in fact, a language that they do not know. Last year when I went to Budapest, I found

myself totally at sea with the language. You will point out that this was hardly surprising, since I have not a syllable of Hungarian. Yet that homely fact seemed like a supreme impertinence: the world made sense, why not the ambient phrases that declared it?

Čapek was by turns enthralled and nonplussed by England; he never abandoned that slight anxiety a continental dweller harbors about islands: “True, it is all built quite solidly enough, one might almost say on rock, but to have a continent beneath one’s feet makes one feel more secure.” England, he found, was a land of curiosities: capacious, chilly, overwhelming, preposterous. At Speaker’s Corner in Hyde Park,

anyone who chooses can bring a chair or platform or nothing at all and can begin to speak. After a while, five or twenty or three-hundred people listen to him, answer him, contradict, nod their head and sometimes sing pious and secular hymns with the speaker. Sometimes an opponent wins the people over to his side and takes up the word himself. Sometimes a crowd separates by simple fission or a coup, like the lowest organisms and cell colonies. . . . The larger churches have small, mobile pulpits but most speakers simply stand on the ground, suck at a wet cigarette and preach about vegetarianism, the Lord God, education, reparations or spiritualism. Never in my life have I seen anything like it.

Čapek is very good at communicating the surfeit and fatigue that being an indefatigable culture tourist involves.

“Have you been to the British Museum?”

“Have you seen the Wallace Collection?”

“Have you been to the Tate Gallery yet?”

“Have you had a look at the South Kensington Museum?”

“Have you been to the National Gallery?”

Yes, yes, yes; I have been everywhere.

Somehow, though, what made the deepest impression was the natural masterpieces on

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view, not the cultural artifacts. Although he is "a tireless pilgrim of pictures and statues," Čapek found that "the conches and crystals in the Natural History Museum" gave him "the greatest delight." ("The trees," he wrote, "are perhaps the most beautiful things in England.")

Čapek visited a number of English clubs, the zoo, and Kew gardens. (The clubs, he manages to suggest, were themselves a sort of menagerie.) At Madame Tussaud's he "stopped next to one particularly effective figure in a top hat and looked in my catalogue to see who it was. Suddenly the gentleman with the top hat moved and left. It was ghastly. After a while two young ladies looked in their catalogue to see whom I represented."

Madame Tussaud's also gave him a deep insight into the relevance of physiognomy:

At first sight a seated gentleman with a goatee beard, No. 12, fascinated me. In the catalogue I found "12: Thomas Neill Cream, executed

1892. Poisoned Matilda Clover with strychnine. He was also found guilty of the murders of three other women." Truly, his face was very suspicious. Number 13: Franz Müller, murdered Mr. Briggs in a train; hmm. Number 20, a shaven gentleman looking almost honourable: Arthur Devereux, executed 1905, the so-called "trunk murderer" since he concealed the corpses of his victims in trunks. Horrible. Number 21:—no, this venerable cleric can't be "Mrs. Deyer, the Reading infant murderess." I find that I have confused the catalogue's pages and am forced to correct my impressions: the seated gentleman, No. 12, is only Bernard Shaw, No. 13 is Louis Blériot and No. 20 is simply Guglielmo Marconi.

"Never again," Čapek concludes, "will I judge people by their faces."

Čapek's wonder and appetite for eccentricity is everywhere inflected by a countermovement of—not skepticism, exactly: more a current of protective ambivalence. Traveling in the English countryside, Čapek marvels at

the harmony and perfection of the life with which the Englishman surrounds himself at home. The English home is tennis and warm water, a gong summoning you to lunch, books, meadows, comfort which is selected, fixed and blessed by the centuries . . . a hospitality and formality as comfortable as a dressing gown.

Nevertheless, there is imperfection woven into this perfection. At the British Empire Exhibition, Čapek was duly impressed by a life-sized statue of the Prince of Wales made of butter, but noted that it filled him with “regret that most of London’s monuments aren’t also made of butter.” London was the pinnacle of modern civilization, embodying its faults as well as its achievements. “The only perfection which modern civilisation achieves,” Čapek complain, “is mechanical; machines are magnificent and immaculate but the life which serves them or is served by them isn’t magnificent or shiny or more perfect or more comely.”

Letters From England falls off a bit when Čapek leaves London, and especially when he wends his way through the Scottish countryside. It picks up again towards the end, especially in “A Few Faces,” a chapter of character sketches of some British luminaries. Čapek provides amusing caricatures and descriptions of John Galsworthy, G. K. Chesterton (“I have drawn him flying, in the first place because I was only able to get a rather fleeting impression of him and then because of his heavenly exuberance”), H. G.

Wells, and George Bernard Shaw: “He is a vegetarian; I don’t know whether from principle or from gourmandise. One never knows whether people have principles on principle or whether for their own personal satisfaction.”

There is a measure of envy mixed in with Čapek’s assessments, but it is quiet envy leavened by generous amounts of appreciation, not least appreciation of the alternatives to London. “The Continent,” he writes, “is noisier, less disciplined, dirtier, more rabid, craftier, more passionate, more convivial, more amorous, hedonistic, vivacious, coarse, garrulous, unruly and somehow less perfect. Please, give me a ticket straight to the Continent.” We may doubt whether *Letters from England* bears comparison with Tacitus; we may even doubt whether it is “among the most influential books” of the last century. But there can be no doubt about its humanity, intelligence, and humor. *Letters from England* is a delight to read, partly because of Čapek’s conviction that “all national peculiarities [are] a positive enrichment of the world.” Although not at all didactic, the book also contains a number of useful lessons—above all, perhaps, the lesson that magnificence is not the only noble national vocation. “I have seen greatness and power, wealth, prosperity and incomparable development,” he writes at the end of his book. “I was never sad that we are a small and unfinished part of the world. To be small, unsettled and uncompleted is a good and courageous mission.”

Oscar: six acts at the Morgan

by John Simon

In a letter to Robert Lowell of November 29, 1967, Dwight Macdonald wrote, "Oscar was almost always *right* (except in his erotic tastes and habits) about all the big issues of his time—social, moral, aesthetic." During the past century, Oscar Wilde has mutated from being regarded by serious people as an author of no importance to one who made them realize the importance of being (and reading) Oscar. Thus did a presumed lightweight become one of the most widely translated Anglophone writers in the world. But how well is Wilde recognized in today's America, where, to be sure, he has enjoyed immortalization via the T-shirt? Many people have only a spotty awareness of him, often depending on the dubious authority of recent plays and movies.

To acquire the foundation of a more extensive knowledge of Wilde, there is no quicker and pleasanter way than taking in the current exhibition at the Morgan Library, "Oscar Wilde: A Life in Six Acts."¹ This is the offshoot of the similarly titled, much larger show displayed last year at the British Library, although the compact New York exhibit includes items not seen in London. We get manuscripts, art works, photographs, letters from and to Wilde, holographs, beautifully bound and illustrated first editions—often opened to their dedi-

cations—as well as all manner of by no means irrelevant ephemera. These include pictures of teachers, friends, and idols of Wilde, and certain artifacts owned by or associated with him. Even those familiar with Wilde's life and works should leave this show with new—or renewed—respect for this witty and tragic man and artist who not only expressed but also embodied virtually all the contradictions and paradoxes the human mind and flesh can be heirs to.

The six acts of this life also have a prologue, with fine portraits of the father, Sir William, eminent Dublin ear and eye surgeon, authority on Irish folklore, natural history, and topography, as well as a womanizer and begetter of bastards. The mother, Jane, was an enthusiastic nationalist, linguist, translator, and provocative writer under the name Speranza. Oscar had an elder brother and an adored younger sister, Isola, who died at age nine. Here is an envelope illustrated by him that contained a lock of her hair, which he kept to his dying day. Here, also, a colored ambrotype of Wilde aged two in a lace-trimmed blue velvet dress—not unusual attire for male children of the period—and looking like a pretty little girl.

In Wilde's earliest surviving letter, the thirteen-year-old boy thanks his mother for a hamper of food, and includes a whimsical drawing of contrasting schoolboy attitudes at the gift's arrival. He also exults in his shirts, "one quite scarlet and the other lilac."

¹ "Oscar Wilde: A Life in Six Acts" opened at the Morgan Library, New York, on September 14, 2001 and will remain on view through January 13, 2002.

A copy of Livy's *Historiae Romanae*, annotated by the fourteen-year-old, heralds the fine classical scholar he was to become; indeed, he won numerous prizes in Greek and Latin at school and university. A notebook, kept at Trinity College, Dublin, shows his involvement in Plato's and Aristotle's approaches to history, and reveals both a fluent handwriting and a sense of melodrama—his name signed in blood. Of similar interest is a watercolor by Oscar of a lake near the Wildes' country house—a painting that Merlin Holland (Wilde's grandson and a guiding spirit of this exhibition) deemed fancifully colored until, after inspecting the site, he found the watercolor to be an accurate artistic representation.

There is a rare Wilde scrapbook, also letters to close Oxford chums that show his playful side. We get a copy of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, cogently annotated by Wilde, and a photograph of him as an Oxford dandy in checkered suit and bowler hat. A letter to Gladstone enclosing a political sonnet reveals Wilde the shrewd self-promoter. We observe him, initially, a disciple of Ruskin, gravitating towards the less moralistic Walter Pater, from whom we see an encouraging letter in a handwriting rather similar to Wilde's.

A charming pencil sketch of Oscar's first, and unrequited, love, the young actress Florence Balcombe, shows both draftsmanly skill and early heterosexual stirrings. (Balcombe subsequently married Bram Stoker.) Wilde was epistolarily courting such actresses as Ellen Terry, Lillie Langtry (mistress of the Prince of Wales), and Sarah Bernhardt, whose pictures we see alongside Oscar's fan letters. Langtry thanks Wilde for giving her Latin lessons! Wilde's earliest poetic efforts are here, including the published Newdigate-prize-winning poem *Ravenna* in pamphlet form. Also, the first satirical representation of Wilde, in *Punch*, the first image associating him with the sunflower, which, along with the lily, became one of his early trademarks, eliciting much public merriment.

As I look at the photographs of Wilde at all ages, it strikes me that this great intransigent aesthete was rather homely, and often overweight. One of the very helpful cards that comment on the exhibited items quotes Wilde's famous remark about two large vases he bought for his Oxford digs: "I find it harder and harder every day to live up to my blue china." Here, I submit, may be the rub. The long hair and ostentatious flowers, the knee breeches and flowing neckties were attempts to compensate for shortcomings of face and body. The show's numerous caricatures—especially those by Thomas Nast, Max Beerbohm, and Toulouse-Lautrec—make this clear. So do cravings for compensatory beauty in other youths, especially Lord Alfred Douglas. About Douglas's sway over Wilde, Frances Winwar, an early American biographer, aptly quoted from John Webster: "Thou hast led me like an heathen sacrifice,/ With music and the fatal pomp of flowers,/ To my eternal ruin."

Here we find such utterances as "I wish I could grave my sonnets on an ivory tablet—quill pens and note paper are only good for bills of lading." From his celebrated American lecture tour, Wilde wrote gems: it provided "a sense of power," he claimed, "that even being abused by the *Saturday Review* never gave me." Famously, Wilde matched drinks with the Leadville, Colorado, miners, earning their admiration as they did his respect: "They wore only what was comfortable and therefore beautiful," he wrote, showing that his words were often smarter than his behavior. We smile at another celebrated letter: "I don't know where I am, but I am between canyons and coyotes. . . . I don't know which is which."

After taking classical firsts at Oxford, Wilde descended on London to live a fashionable and extravagant life that soon used up his father's legacy. Many items attest to this phase, such as a magazine portrait depicting him as "The Bard of Beauty," along with sundry mordant caricatures. Finally, he published his first (unsuccessful) play, *Vera, or the Nihilists*, exhibited here alongside of a

volume, *Poems*, sent to sundry celebrities as well as to the Oxford Union. On the advice of Oliver Elton, then a mere undergraduate, the Union rejected it. Wilde's poetry admittedly started out derivative and attitudinizing, but it continually improved and, all along, comprised genuine achievements.

Here is sheet music for one of the popular songs inspired by the American lecture tour, along with trade cards using Wilde's likeness to advertise everything from carpets to "bosom beautifiers." There are some of Napoleon Sarony's famed portrait photographs, along with the "aesthetic teapot" celebrating the Savoyards's *Patience*, decorated with the figures of the eponymous milkmaid and the hero, the poet Reginald Bunthorne, partly modeled on Wilde, and affecting a sunflower and a limp wrist. There is the letter in which Oscar tells Mrs. Langtry of his impending marriage to Constance Lloyd,

a grave, slight, violet-eyed little Artemis, with great coils of heavy brown hair which make her flower-like head droop like a flower, and wonderful ivory hands which draw music from the piano so sweet that the birds stop singing to listen to her.

Constance, in turn, writes to her brother that she is "perfectly and insanely happy," and, to Oscar, three charmingly rapt letters. Executors or family later destroyed all of Oscar's letters to Constance save one. We note its ending: "I feel incomplete without you. Ever and ever yours." Unfortunately, Oscar also felt incomplete with her.

Soon we come across the beautiful autograph manuscript of the balefully lovely "poem of dire foreboding," the disguisedly autobiographical "Harlot's House," and portraits by Will Rothenstein of Robert Ross—Wilde's first male lover and lifelong friend—and of Lord Alfred Douglas, nicknamed Bosie, engineer of Wilde's undoing. There is also the manuscript version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, with a subsequently deleted reference to homosexual love.

Most absorbing are typescripts of the

major plays, draft upon draft, with additions, deletions, and corrections that were being returned to the typist in neat gray folders. Anyone thinking that this was a giddy author blithely improvising on paper has another one coming: the corrections are numerous, the improvements great. Again, a letter to George Alexander, who produced, directed, and acted in most of these plays, shows Wilde's intense and intelligent involvement in details of staging. Especially fascinating is an early version of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, with a fourth act later judiciously dropped. Also, the proof of the first state of a Beardsley illustration for *Salome*, displaying a set of male genitals subsequently covered with a fig leaf.

Acts V and VI of the exhibition document Oscar's fall, beginning with a wrenching *cri de coeur* to Bosie, a letter that, along with other incriminating missives, the prosecution made heavy weather of at Wilde's trials. It contrasts strongly with a happy letter to Ross from an Algerian trip with Bosie, with its report of "villages peopled by fauns. Several shepherds fluted on reeds for us." The triumph of *Earnest*—we see the first program—is followed by a transcript of the first trial. Among the various exhibits is a note to Douglas on the night of Oscar's arrest, containing the words "no bail possible I am told." The next program we see, for *An Ideal Husband*, has, like others to come, Wilde's name removed from it.

In a touching letter to another loyal friend, Robert Sherard, Constance relates the sadness of seeing her imprisoned husband in bad shape. She changed her surname to Holland, but bravely did not divorce him. Most important here is the autograph manuscript of the very long prison letter to Douglas, known as *De Profundis*, whose sending was disallowed by the prison authorities, but which is today widely read and admired.

Wilde emerged from jail a broken man and assumed the name Sebastian Melmoth, from the martyred saint and the hero of his great-uncle's novel *Melmoth the Wanderer*.

On display is a silver card case, gift of Ada Leverson, and a visiting card with the exile's pseudonym. Also Sickert's pencil drawing of Wilde looking haggard upon his release and, as its sitter put it, "altered in appearance so that no one can hardly recognize me." In a letter to yet another faithful friend, Reggie Turner, Wilde explains that he will always love Bosie, even though a three months' joint sojourn in Naples proved disastrous. Constance and a few friends and publishers supported Wilde, but Constance died in 1898 in Genoa and was buried under her maiden name. In a letter to her brother, Wilde tells of a visit to her grave, "deeply affected—with a sense, also, of the uselessness of all regrets." He traveled quite a bit, but was never able to write again, save for *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898). This work contained a touching dedication to Major Nelson, Oscar's last, and only humane, prison warden. Though distressingly deprived from seeing his sons, Oscar bore up nobly under poverty and ignominy, living on handouts. The deterioration of his handwriting, however, attests to his pain.

In May 1900, Wilde returned from his European wanderings to Paris, where he

settled in "the poor little Bohemian" Hôtel d'Alsace on the Left Bank, "only suited for those Sybarites who are exiled from Sybaris." We see the dingy abode in a period photograph; ironically, it is today transformed into L'Hôtel, an expensive and exclusive pitstop for traveling but unexiled Sybarites. I stayed there once and saw Wilde's room turned into a mini-museum, featuring, among other memorabilia, the unpaid bill, uncollected by the generous landlord, whom the moribund Wilde was still able to charm. "My wallpaper and I are fighting a duel to the death," he joked, "one or the other of us has to go." It was Wilde who went, from a prison ailment that became severely aggravated and extremely painful, a few weeks after his forty-sixth birthday. Robbie Ross paid the landlord's bill.

Just as the hotel went from dump to luxury residence, so Wilde has grown in posthumous stature. A tragic hero, the man and his life have become object lessons, his works read and duly appreciated. The exhibition—curated in London by Sally Brown, in New York by Christine Nelson—will contribute handsomely to the refulgence of this both legendary and all-too-human figure.

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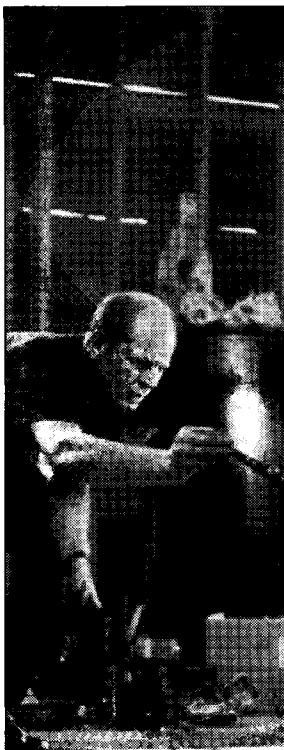
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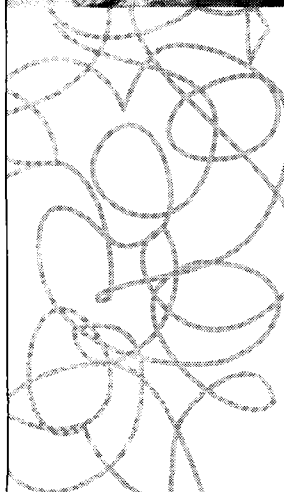
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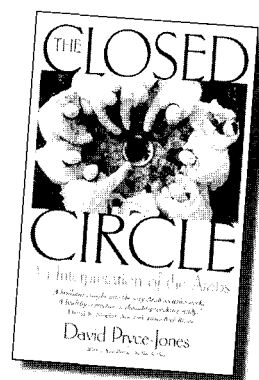
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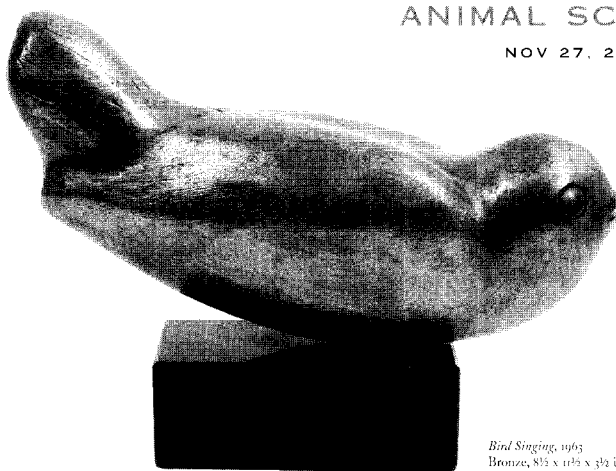
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